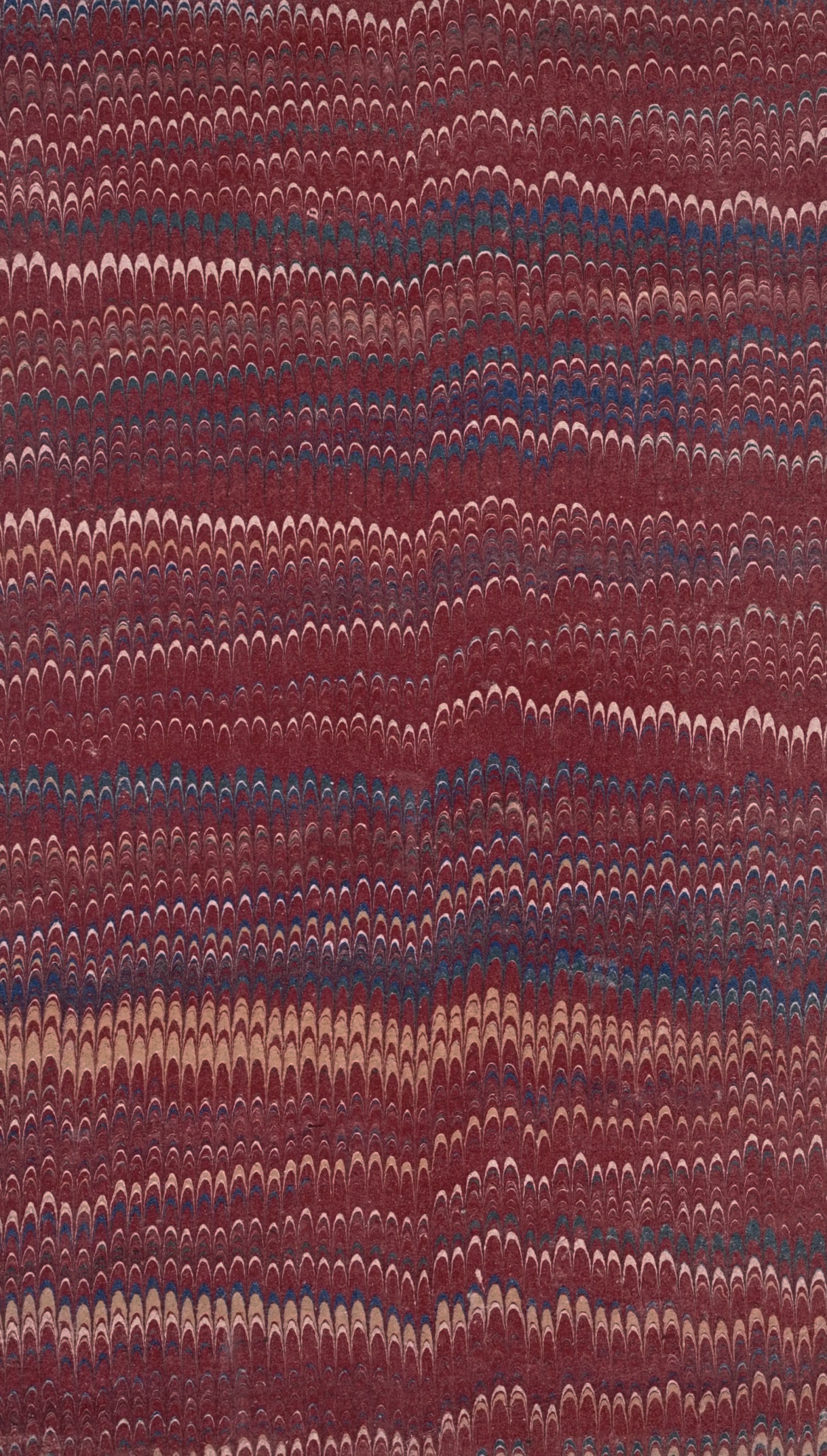
PZ 3
.H289Cr

FT MEADE
GenColl

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



D227
371

o. 137. 20 CENTS.

FICTION · SCIENCE · RELIGION

LOVELL'S LIBRARY

TRI-WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF THE BEST CURRENT & STANDARD LITERATURE

Vol. 3, No. 137. July 14, 1883. Annual Subscription, $25.00.

CRUEL LONDON

BY

JOSEPH HATTON

AUTHOR OF

"CLYTIE," "IN THE LAP OF FORTUNE,"
ETC., ETC.

Entered at the Post Office, N. Y., as second-class matter.
Copyright, 1883, by JOHN W. LOVELL CO.

NEW YORK
JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY
14 & 16 VESEY STREET.

eat CLOTH BINDING for this volume can be obtained from any bookseller or newsdealer, price 10cts.

"Dr. Newton has had given to him the spiritual sense of what people wanted, and this he has reverently, clearly and definitely furnished."—*Boston Herald*, March 17.

THE RIGHT AND WRONG

USES OF THE BIBLE.

By Rev. R. Heber Newton.

No. 83, "Lovell's Library," Paper Covers, 20 Cents; Also in Cloth, Red Edges, 75 Cents.

"Dr. Newton has not separated his heart from his head in these religious studies, and has thus been preserved from the mistakes which a purely critical mind might have been led."—*N. Y. Times*, March 12.

"Those who wish to abuse Dr. Newton should do so before reading his lectures, as, after reading them, they may find it quite impossible to do so."—*N. Y. Star*, March 11.

"It is impossible to read these sermons without high admiration of the author's courage; of his honesty, his reverential spirit, his wide and careful reading, and his true conservatism."—*American Literary Churchman.*

For sale by all Newsdealers and Booksellers.

JOHN W. LOVELL CO., Publishers,

14 & 16 Vesey St., New York.

LOVELL'S LIBRARY.

CATALOGUE.

1. Hyperion, by H. W. Longfellow...20
2. Outre-Mer, by H. W. Longfellow...20
3. The Happy Boy, by Björnson.....10
4. Arne, by Björnson.....10
5. Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus, by Mrs. Shelley.....10
6. The Last of the Mohicans, by J. Fenimore Cooper.....20
7. Clytie, by Joseph Hatton.....20
8. The Moonstone, by Collins, P't I..10
9. The Moonstone, by Collins, P't II.10
10. Oliver Twist, by Charles Dickens.20
11. The Coming Race, by Lytton.....10
12. Leila, by Lord Lytton.....10
13. The Three Spaniards, by Walker..20
14. The Tricks of the Greeks Unveiled; or, the Art of Winning at every Game, by Robert Houdin.....20
15. L'Abbé Constantin, by Halévy..20
16. Freckles, by R. F. Redcliff.....20
17. The Dark Colleen, by Harriett Jay.20
18. They Were Married! by Walter Besant and James Rice.....10
19. Seekers after God, by Canon Farrar.20
20. The Spanish Nun, by Thos. De Quincey.....10
21. The Green Mountain Boys, by Judge D. P. Thompson..... 20
22. Fleurette, by Eugene Scribe.....20
23. Second Thoughts, by Rhoda Broughton.....20
24. The New Magdalen, by Wilkie Collins.....20
25. Divorce, by Margaret Lee 20
26. Life of Washington, by Henley..20
27. Social Etiquette, by Mrs. W. A. Saville.....15
28. Single Heart and Double Face, by Charles Reade.....10
29. Irene, by Carl Detlef.....20
30. Vice Versâ; or, a Lesson to Fathers, by F. Anstey.....20
31. Ernest Maltravers, by Lord Lytton.20
32. The Haunted House and Calderon the Courtier, by Lord Lytton...10
33. John Halifax, by Miss Mulock....20
34. 800 Leagues on the Amazon, being Part I of the Giant Raft, by Jules Verne.....10
35. The Cryptogram, being Part II of the Giant Raft, by Jules Verne..10
36. Life of Marion, by Horry and Weems.20
37. Paul and Virginia.....10
38. Tale of Two Cities, by Dickens....20
39. The Hermits, by Kingsley. 20
40. An Adventure in Thule, and Marriage of Moira Fergus, by Wm. Black.....10
41. A Marriage in High Life, by Octave Feuillet 20
42. Robin, by Mrs. Parr.....20
43. Two on a Tower, by Thomas Hardy.20
44. Rasselas, by Samuel Johnson.....10
45. Alice, or, the Mysteries, being Part II of Ernest Maltravers..... .20
46. Duke of Kandos, by A. Matthey...20
47. Baron Munchausen.....10
48. A Princess of Thule, by Wm. Black.20
49. The Secret Despatch, by Grant....20
50. Early Days of Christianity, by Canon Farrar, D,D., Part I.....20
Early Days of Christianity, by Canon Farrar, D.D., Part II.....20
51. Vicar of Wakefield, by Oliver Goldsmith 10
52. Progress and Poverty, by Henry George..... 20
53. The Spy, by J. Fenimore Cooper...20
54. East Lynne, by Mrs. Henry Wood.20
55. A Strange Story, by Lord Lytton..20
56. Adam Bede, by Geo. Eliot, Part I..15
Adam Bede, by Geo. Eliot, Part II..15
57. The Golden Shaft, by Gibbon.20
58. Portia, or, By Passions Rocked, by The Duchess.....20
59. Last Days of Pompeii, by Lytton.20
60. The Two Duchesses, being the sequel to the Duke of Kandos, by A. Mathey.....20
61. Tom Brown's School Days at Rugby.....20
62. The Wooing O't, by Mrs. Alexander, Part I..... 15
The Wooing O't, by Mrs. Alexander, Part II.....15
63. The Vendetta, Tales of Love and Passion, by Honoré de Balzac..20
64. Hypatia, by Rev. Kingsley, Part I..15
Hypatia, by Kingsley, Part II. ...15
65. Selma, by Mrs. J. Gregory Smith..15
66. Margaret and her Bridesmaids...20
67. Horse Shoe Robinson, Part I..... 15
Horse Shoe Robinson, Part II.....15
68. Gulliver's Travels, by Dean Swift..20
69. Amos Barton, by George Eliot....10
70. The Berber, by W. E. Mayo.....20
71. Silas Marner, by George Eliot....10
72. The Queen of the County.....20
73. Life of Cromwell, by Paxton Hood..15
74. Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Bronté...20
75. Child's History of England, by Charles Dickens.....20
76. Molly Bawn, by The Duchess.....20
77. Pillone, by William Bergsöe.....15
78. Phyllis, by the Duchess 20
79. Romola, by George Eliot, Part I...15
Romola, by George Eliot, Part II..15
80. Science in Short Chapters.....20
81. Zanoni, by Lord Lytton.....20
82. A Daughter of Heth, by W. Black.20
83. The Right and Wrong Uses of the Bible, by Rev. R. Heber Newton.20
84. Night and Morning, by Lord Lytton Part I..... ..15
Night and Morning, by Lord Lytton Part II..... 15

LOVELL'S LIBRARY.

CATALOGUE.

85. Shandon Bells, by William Black..20
86. Monica, by The Duchess.....10
87. Heart and Science, by Wilkie Collins.....20
88. The Golden Calf, by Miss M. E. Braddon.....20
89. The Dean's Daughter, by Mrs. Gore 20
90. Mrs. Geoffrey, by The Duchess..20
91. Pickwick Papers, Part I..... .20
Pickwick Papers, Part II.....20
92. Airy Fairy Lilian, by The Duchess.20
93. McLeod of Dare, by Wm. Black.20
94. Tempest Tossed, by Tilton, P't I.20
Tempest Tossed, by Tilton, P't II.20
95. Letters from High Latitudes, by Lord Dufferin.....20
96. Gideon Fleyce, by Henry W. Lucy.20
97. India and Ceylon, by E. Hæckle..20
98. The Gypsy Queen, by Hugh De Normand.....20
99. The Admiral's Ward, by Mrs. Alexander 20
100. Nimport, by E. L. Bynner, P't I..15
Nimport, by E. L. Bynner, P't II. . 15
101. Harry Holbrooke, by Sir H. Randall Roberts.. 20
102. Tritons, by E. Lasseter Bynner, Part I 15
Tritons, by E. Lasseter Bynner, Part II..... 15
103 Let Nothing You Dismay, by Walter Besant.....10
104. Lady Audley's Secret, by Miss M. E. Braddon.....20
105. Woman's Place To-Day, by Mrs. Lillie Devereux Blake.....20
106. Dunallan, by Kennedy, Part I...15
Dunallan, by Kennedy, Part II..15
107. Housekeeping and Home-Making, by Marion Harland..... 15
108. No New Thing, by W. E. Norris..20
109. The Spoopendyke Papers, by Stanley Huntley 20
110. False Hopes, by Goldwin Smith..15
111. Labor and Capital, by Edward Kellogg 20
112. Wanda, by Ouida, Part I.....15
Wanda, by Ouida, Part II.....15
113. More Words About the Bible, by Rev. Jas. S. Bush... 20
114. Monsieur Lecoq, by Gaboriau, P't I.20
Monsieur Lecoq, by Gaboriau, P't II.20
115. An Outline of Irish History, by Justin H. McCarthy.....10
116. The Lerouge Case, by Gaboriau..20
117. Paul Clifford, by Lord Lytton...20
118. A New Lease of Life, by About..20
119. Bourbon Lillies.....20
120. Other Peoples' Money, by Emile Gaboriau..... 20
121. The Lady of Lyons, by Lord Lytton.10
122. Ameline de Bourg.....15
123. A Sea Queen, by W. Clark Russell.20
124. The Ladies Lindores, by Mrs. Oliphant 20
125. Haunted Hearts, by J. P. Simpson.10
126. Loys, Lord Beresford, by The Duchess 20
127. Under Two Flags, by Ouida, P't I.15
Under Two Flags, by Ouida, P't II.15
128. Money, by Lord Lytton.....10
129. In Peril of His Life, by Gaboriau.20
130. India, by Max Müller.....20
131. Jets and Flashes 20
132. Moonshine and Marguerites, by The Duchess.....10
133. Mr. Scarborough's Family, by Anthony Trollope, Part I.....15
Mr. Scarborough's Family, by Anthony Trollope, Part II.....15
134. Arden, by A. Mary F. Roberts...15
135. The Tower of Percemont, by George Sand.....20
136. Yolande, by Wm. Black.....20
137. Cruel London, by Joseph Hatton.20
138. The Gilded Clique, by Gaboriau...20
139. Pike County Folks, by E. H. Mott..20
140. Cricket on the Hearth, by Dickens.10
141. Henry Esmond, by Thackeray....20
142. Strange Adventures of a Phaeton, by Wm. Black.....20
143. Denis Duval, by W. M. Thackeray.10
144. Old Curiosity Shop, by Charles Dickens, Part I.....15
Old Curiosity Shop, by Charles Dickens, Part II.... 15
145. Ivanhoe, by Scott, Part I.....15
Ivanhoe, by Scott, Part II 15
146. White Wings, by Wm. Black.....20
147. The Sketch Book, by Washington Irving 20
148. Catherine, by W. M. Thackeray..10
149. Janet's Repentance, by George Eliot..... 10
150. Barnaby Rudge, by Chas. Dickens Part I.....15
Barnaby Rudge, by Chas. Dickens Part II 15
151. Felix Holt, by George Eliot.....20
152. Richelieu, by Lord Lytton. 10
153. Sunrise, by Wm. Black, Part I....15
Sunrise, by Wm. Black, Part II..15
154. Tour of the World in 80 Days, by Jules Verne.....20
155. Mysteries of Orcival, by Emile Gaboriau..... 20
156. Lovel, The Widower, by W. M. Thackeray 10
158. David Copperfield, by Charles Dickens, Part I.....20
David Copperfield, by Charles Dickens, Part II.....20
160. Rienzi, by Lord Lytton, Part I...15
Rienzi, by Lord Lytton, Part II..15

CRUEL LONDON.

A Novel.

BY

JOSEPH HATTON,

AUTHOR OF

"CLYTIE," "THE QUEEN OF BOHEMIA," "THE VALLEY OF POPPIES," CHRISTOPHER KENRICK," "IN THE LAP OF FORTUNE," ETC.

40

NEW YORK:

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY,

14 AND 16 VESEY STREET.

1883

PRESS OPINIONS.

CRUEL LONDON.

MORNING POST.

"Nothing so powerful has appeared in fiction since Charles Reade wrote his immortal story of 'Hard Cash.'"

MAYFAIR.

"'Cruel London,' is a clever, powerful work, of a very diffierent calibre from the rank and file of novels..... So ends a book of which the dialogue is spirited and the plot original. We have been quite unable to do justice to its merits, but we do not shrink from saying that it is far away the best novel we have read this year."

SUNDAY TIMES.

"In 'Cruel London,' Mr. Hatton has touched a point higher than he has reached in any previous novel, and has, indeed, produced a work which in its line may stand comparison with anything English prose fiction has for many years produced. Not only has he written a singularly striking and powerful story, he has created living and recognisable characters, has interwoven with remarkable skill their adventures, and has shaped a book which is at once an interesting psychological study, an elaborate and ingenious puzzle, and a clever and spirited satire upon modern institutions."

PALL MALL GAZETTE.

"It abounds in adventure, and is not altogether free from extravagance. There are descriptions of persons and things which are graphic and picturesque to the verge of poetry."

ATHENÆUM.

"Both power and pains are exhibited in Mr. Hatton's new story..... The method of Tom Sleaford's death is terrible, and told with a skill which actually lulls the conscience into some measure of approval of his slayer."

DAILY NEWS.

"Above all we find here the movement, the quick succession of incidents, the diversity of character, and the sustained expectation which are essential to romance."

NOTICE.

This work has been dramatized and duly protected as a stage play, by the Author.

PZ3
.H285
Cr

To

MY BEST AND OLDEST FRIEND,

L. H.

CRUEL LONDON.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

HARVEST HOME.

'JENNIE, I have never told you how much I love you until to-night.'

"Not in words, Uncle Martin, but in deeds, dear, in many a kindly act, and in a thousand different ways."

The speakers were an old weatherbeaten man and a young and beautiful woman. They might be typified by a gnarled oak and a budding ash; the one crooked and knotted with age, the other soft and tender and full of life's youthful vigor.

Squire Martin was a rugged, hard-looking man with strong lines in his face, and bony, nervous hands.

Jane Crosby was a hearty English girl of three or four and twenty, a fresh, happy-looking, well-built woman, with brown hair braided close to her head, which was planted clean and firm upon a pair of handsome shoulders that sloped down and gave graceful contour to her well-developed bust.

There was no nonsense about Miss Crosby. Nature intended her for a fine woman, and Nature had had her way.

Beneath Jane's light cotton gown there was no suspicion of stays. She had a soft gray eye, and a firm mouth, with just sufficient prominence of lip to indicate love of life, generosity, friendship, and all that is genial and good. It was a face made for happiness, but full of tender patience; a face that would light up with pleasure or reflect the lowering clouds of trouble. In short, Jane Crosby was a true woman—just such a woman as most men admire, but whom the majority of her sex would charge with a want of refinement; just such a woman as Mayfair might turn up its nose at, and pronounce fat and provincial; just such a woman, however, as would turn the heads of the men at a Belgravian reception; though my Lady Fashion insists upon declaring slender figures to be the height of beauty.

Uncle Martin sat by the first fire of the autumn, after Harvest Home had been celebrated, with Jane Crosby's head upon his knee.

Jane liked to nestle by the inglenook on a hassock sufficiently low to enable her to caress Shep, the favorite sheepdog, or to lay her head upon Uncle Martin's knee and look alternately into his face or into the fire, where she would picture her destiny in a vague, shadowy way, with nothing certain in the imaginative story, except the face of John Kerman, her uncle's right hand in the harvest fields, and her constant companion.

"It come over me to tell you to-night, lovey, how my poor old heart warms to you. I think it is because this is the last harvest I shall gather in, because, lass, I feel that it's my Harvest Home."

"Don't say that, uncle; you never looked better, and I'm sure you never spoke nicer than you did when the lads drank your health, and you thanked them."

"I was looking back, lass, and wishing I'd been kind to 'em; wishing I hadn't lost my temper so often; wishing I hadn't been hard to them, hard and brutal, lass."

The old man's hot tears fell upon the girl's hand. She brushed away her own and looked up at him, smiling like the sun through a summer shower.

"No, no, uncle, you have always been good; they have never wanted their wage for an hour. When the crops failed, and our neighbors discharged their servants, you kept men on; and nobody speaks of you without respect."

"I kept them on; yes, and I did it with a curse. If I'd my time to come over again, and knew what I know now,

I would be kind as well as just; kind like thou art, lovey; I'd try and walk, if it was a long way off, in the footsteps of Him who was the kindest gentleman that ever trod the earth. It come to me to say this to-night, Jennie, and I am not ashamed. I think I've been too proud and too shy to be kind to people, somehow as if my heart had got crusted over, lovey, and couldn't work rightly."

The firelight played lovingly upon the two figures, Summer and Winter, Hope and Despair, the Past and the Future, the gnarled oak waiting for the axe, the young ash-plant waiting for the sun and rain to fashion it into a tree, that shall bend gracefully before the wind, and lift its tender, loving branches towards the sky.

The flickering beams wrapped the man and maiden in their ruddy embrace, hovering about them, playing in the folds of the girl's dress, turning her brown hair into threads of red gold, and softening the rugged lines of the old man's wrinkled face.

It was a touching picture; a picture for joy and sorrow; a picture to be sad over, a picture to rejoice at; a picture of human life, so real that the joy of it was heart-aching.

It was Life and Death, May and December, the violet and the withered leaf, the song of joy, the dirge of despair, Spring Leaves and Harvest Home.

The firelight seemed to know the quality and character of the picture, lingering fondly about it, touching gently the old man's face, caressing his hands, and dwelling lovingly upon the brown hair of the head that nestled upon his knee.

"But I have never been unkind to Jennie," he continued, this time as if answering his thoughts or responding to the quiet upbraidings of his conscience. "I don't remember ever saying an angry word to Jennie, and I think I always loved my sister, who died when Jennie was born—died a widow, bless her dear heart, as good a woman as ever breathed; but I've been a brute to Jack Kerman. Nay, it's no good saying I haven't. I have been a brute, just as I have to others, for that matter, the Lord forgive me! I think it was because I was jealous of him, afraid that Jennie had got to think too much about him; afraid some day that he might ask me for her, and then I think I could have killed him. When I'm gone—when the last load is stacked—when we've said our last say, and the gleaners are in the stubble, then maybe I could bear to think that somebody

claimed her for his own; and what's more, that she had a strong arm to lean on when she wanted to be taken care of. Where are you, Jennie?"

"Here, uncle dear," said Jane, rising and putting her arms around his neck, while Shep started to his feet to lick his hands, and then lie down again once more in the firelight.

"You love this Kerman," said the old man, taking her hand in his, and looking into her face. "I think you do, and I think he may be a good fellow in his way, for his father was straight and honest as daylight, fair-dealing and true to his word, and lent me five thousand pounds once when I needed it—aye, so much that I'd have broken without it; and to-night I like to tell you all this while there's time to-night when the wheat is all in. But I don't know whether Jack's his father's son or his mother's. He's flighty a bit in his ways, and proud, and thinks he knows best, and wants to be a great man, and all that; but anything that you look tenderly on, anything that you love, must be good, Jennie, though I cannot altogether trust him."

"You love me too much to do justice to John," said Jane Crosby, kissing the old man's forehead. "He's always been my friend, and kind to me, and always faithful to you, uncle dear, always."

"Yes, yes, faithful, yes, that's something; kind to you's nothing. You might as well say the earth is kind to the sun when it lies soddened and the sun smiles on it, and the seed grows, and presently the wind bends the tall, filling ears of grain. I wish I were young again, Jennie. You never saw me in my prime, before she was faithless. I was once in love, Jennie, and a thief stole her from me—a thief, Jennie, a wily thief, and she died abroad—died, and I never saw her again; and I think that made a brute of me, a hard, morose man, a money-grubber; but we'll not talk of that it is so long ago. I sometimes think it is only a dream. We will not talk of it. Let the past go. It is the future we have to deal with, Jennie—your future, my dear. If you were your own mistress to-morrow, Jennie, with broad lands, and money in the bank, what would you do?"

"Whatever you asked me, dear," said Jennie.

"And what would you like me to ask you to do? Give it all to Kerman, and you along with it?"

Jennie pressed his hand, and hid her face even from the firelight which came prying round her warm and ruddy.

"Ah, we are all slaves, Jennie; slaves to some hidden master, who leads us at will. But it is all one at last; though, I'd like you to have happy days, Jennie—a life without care, with nothing to do but look beautiful, and have your heart full of content and pleasure: a good time from now all through the long summer of your life, and a Harvest Home rich and rare, and full of gathered joys. But a man, I'm thinking, does not always like the money to be on the woman's side, Jennie; it takes his pride out of him—it saps his independence, and it sometimes makes a man vain and arrogant, instead of submissive and gentle. I have seen to it, Jennie; I have seen to it. Jeremiah Sleaford made me a will a year or so back, but I've altered it. I was wrong in having a secret from my own lawyer, Jabez Thompson, and got nearly punished for it; but that's all over now; and you may trust Jabez. Perhaps he's a bit too fond of horses for a lawyer, though I never knew a man who was downright fond of horseflesh that was a bad 'un. Be wary of Mr. Sleaford; he calls himself my relation. Mayhap he is, I don't know; a cousin ten times off, or something like that. I hope I've saved him from the necessity of being a rogue, but I don't know. Only you take none of his advice; stick to dear old Jabez. He's got a heart as well as a head. Don't cry, my darling; don't cry. When the grain is ripe it must be reaped, and it's a quiet time after harvest; a time to sit by the fire and think of the summer that is gone, and the winter that is coming in. You have been my summer, Jennie, and the comfort of my harvest home is that I have never said an unkind word to you—never, never once."

Again the hot tears filled the old man's eyes, and the firelight crept about him, mingling its embraces with the maiden.

* * * * * * *

And when the night was almost spent, they carried the old man out of the firelight into the cold shadow of the waning moon.

CHAPTER II.

THE SLEAFORDS.

JEREMIAH SLEAFORD, ESQ., of Fitzroy Square, London, was one of those phenomena of the English metropolis who have practically no profession, no property, no income, and yet contrive to live in a semi-fashionable house, in good style, and to support a family that goes into society.

Jeremiah Sleaford was one of those creations of an aristocratic system of government that over-estimate the necessity of keeping up appearances, and do not sufficiently value the old-fashioned principle of being honestly what you are and living your own life. Mr. Sleaford had continually discounted the future, and, if he ever condescended to argue the point, he would prove by the clearest logic that only on his system could men of brains without money hold their own against the brutal tyranny of capital.

Commencing life in the city of Lincoln as an articled clerk to a local solicitor, he had been industrious enough to obtain his articles, and had actually commenced to practise on his own account, not in the city of his birth, but in the great metropolis, where he had considerably supplemented attorneyship with financing, money-lending, and journalism.

Finally, Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford had studied for the Bar, and in the midst of his dinners he had married the corner house in Fitzroy Square, with five thousand pounds, which had practically ruined him : for his sanguine temperament had led him into the reckless investment of house and money, and had left him with an extravagant son (whom he loved with all the strength and weakness of his nature) of five and twenty, two interesting daughters, and a wife a little older than himself, all dependent upon his successes as a hanger-on of public companies, and a promoter more particularly of gold and silver mines, in which he had sunk name, fame, and cash.

it, some friends in the city who had escaped the financial whirlwind bought the contents of the corner house in Fitzroy Square, and settled the family goods upon Mrs. Sleaford, as hard and fast as the house itself, so that Jeremiah with his bald head, and his bushy whiskers, could not throw the fine old house into a gold mine, even if he had found it difficult to keep the fine old house going in the way of butcher's meat and servants.

Two years prior to his death, Uncle Martin had sent for Sleaford to make his will.

He did not, he said, want any of the Lincolnshire folk to know how he had left his property. Local solicitors were too fond of leaving their papers about, and their clerks cackled and let out secrets. So he had bethought him of his old friend and distant relation, Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford, and after some trouble had found him out, and brought him down from London, without any one being the wiser; for Uncle Martin had met him at the White Horse Hotel, in the old city, and had then and there instructed him.

Mr. Sleaford had brought down the papers, and Uncle Martin had executed the will in the presence of his banker and Mr. Sleaford's clerk; and the document had been there and then sealed, and deposited at the county bank.

The London attorney had protested that he would rather the will had been prepared by a stranger, inasmuch as Mr. Martin had left him three thousand pounds; but the old farmer had smiled, and said that was nothing; and the banker did not think Mr. Sleaford need have the slightest scruple when he compared that small sum with the large property bequeathed to others.

Two years had passed away, and the business was only significant, Sleaford would say, when the matter was mentioned, from the fact that it was almost his last purely professional act in the law, though the will had a not uninfluential clause or two in reference to the house of Sleaford. Beyond this he would not speak of the contents of Squire Martin's last testamentary commands. They represented the Lincolnshire farmer's secret. "The time would come," he would say, with an air of mystery that irritated Mrs. Sleaford to madness. But the financier was firm in the maintenance of his secret—the only thing in which he really was firm. Squire Martin had sent to London for a solicitor on the ground of secrecy; and, though that attorney had practically retired from practice, he nevertheless had not

given up the habit of respecting the confidences of those few men who, until they were dead, might still be regarded as his clients.

If you had seen Sleaford go out in a morning to the City, you might have mistaken him for the happiest and most prosperous of men. He was a round-faced, florid complexioned, beaming gentleman, with a smile upon his lips, and a sentiment always bubbling up to them.

He wore scrupulously clean linen, a black velvet waistcoat, and tie showing a set of diamond studs, gray trousers, a black frock coat, a hat with a band round it, because hatbands have a sympathetic appearance, and he carried a gold-headed cane.

He was fifty years of age; he looked forty, and walked with the jaunty air of a youth.

He could never forget that he once owned a hundred thousand pounds, and was chairman of the Kamtschatka Gold Mining Company, Limited.

It is true the hundred thousand pounds were in the scrip of that company, and that they had been reckoned at half-a-crown a share by the official liquidator.

Still, Mr. Seaforth only remembered his wealth as it was originally set down; and he would tell you how during the panic he had lost hundreds of thousands of pounds, and that he never expected to be as rich again as he had been, but, nevertheless, that he would not complain; no, he would not complain; and he had some schemes in hand which must turn out well, and which positively might even retrieve all his lost fortunes.

It was a pleasant sight, as I said before, to see Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford start for the city. His faded wife, with her curls and black lace mittens, would kiss his wide and manly forehead; Patty and Emily would kiss his dear, whiskered cheeks; Tom would say, "By by, gov.; shall see you in the city;" and Tim Malony, the man-of-all-work, who had been with the family all through the panic and since, would brush his hat, and turn him out into the street with admiring words, that would have been resented as too familiar if Tim had not been a faithful servant, not to say a useful ally; for the servant was somewhat of the master's nature, and had in him a spirit of brag and adventure which linked the two together in a bond of sympathy, which Jeremiah Sleaford, Esq., was always ready to acknowledge in a patronizing kind of way that was eminently satisfactory to

Tim's sense of humor, and did not in any way outrage his national pride. In his own heart Tim believed his master to be a rogue, but that opinion was a secret which Tim held as dear as his life; for he was himself but indifferently honest, and he had a sympathetic admiration for Jeremiah Sleaford, Esquire.

"Tim," said the master, on a dull, foggy morning, two days after the death of the famous Lincolnshire farmer, "Tim, when a man dies his secret is out; at least the one in question is no longer a secret, and I commit no breach, Tim, now, in saying that the fickle goddess of fortune has a really good thing in store for us at last."

"Indade, and heaven send it betime," said Tim, brushing his master's hat while they stood in the hall of the family residence. "Be jabers, an' I thought there was bad news, as the missus and the girls haven't come out to kiss yer honor on the step."

"Grief, Tim, the natural grief of tender hearts. It's a death in the family, Tim, a death," said the master.

"A death, is it? A death with money in it; and I'd loike to attind the wake if the body's left ye a furtune," said Tim, giving the finishing touch to the shining hat, which his master looked into solemnly, and then pressed gently upon his white and shining brow.

"There will be no wake, Tim, but there will be a funeral, and you shall accompany Mr. Tom Sleaford and myself to that solemn ceremony."

"Ah, by my sowl, and I'll accompany you to the devil if ye ax me; and it's a joy to know that at least the hatband ye've had such a fancy for will be a genuine bit of furniture after all; and if there's money in the funeral, be jabers I'd have a hatband to the top of my hat, like old Flippers, the baker, when Lord Timbuctoo, his forty-ninth cousin, died and didn't even mention his name in the will."

"Don't damp the legitimate hopes of an honest man by such unhappy reference to the weaknesses and misfortunes of others, Tim," said Jeremiah the Magnificent; "but consult your mistress as to the course to be pursued in regard to the funeral of our relative, Squire Martin, and say that I think Smith Brothers, of Regent Street, the famous mercers in black, will be only too happy to open a quarterly account with her, especially on so auspicious—I mean on so melancholy an occasion."

"I will, yer honor. Good-morning, sir," said Tim, as he

closed the door, with an air of demonstrative respect, upon the gentleman who was off to the city, and upon the fog that was not off anywhere, but had made up its mind to be on hand all day in city and suburb.

The dining-room of No. 1, Fitzroy Square, served as breakfast, dining, and drawing-room for the Sleafords except on company days, and once a month, when Mrs. Sleaford was "at home."

On this memorable morning in question, Mrs Sleaford, the two girls and Tom, took counsel together over the fire, while Tim removed the breakfast things.

Tom was strongly of opinion that, if old Martin had left them anything, his death would have been announced to them by some member of the family. And what did the governor mean by saying that one member of the Sleaford family in particular would be glad? Mrs. Sleaford really did not know what the relationship was. She had never heard Jeremiah talk of Squire Martin as his cousin before, except on one occasion when the poet Tennyson was mentioned; he said he had distant relations in the county which gave the laureate birth. Patty and Emily thought it would be a pleasant change to go into mourning, especially just as the winter was coming on.

"But how is it to be paid for?" asked Mrs. Sleaford, looking round upon her thoughtless family.

"Oh, the master's arranged that," said the privileged servant, Tim, as he was carrying off the last article of domestic economy connected with the recent repast.

"Has he?" said Mrs. Sleaford, interrogatively.

"The great mourning-house of Smith Brothers will open an account," said Tim; "and if you'll go there at once, I'll attend ye, ma'am: and it will be best to have a brougham, and I'll be sitting on the box to give importance to the event, anyhow."

"Very well, Tim," said Mrs. Sleaford; "fetch the brougham in an hour, and Miss Emily and myself will be ready."

"Thank ye, ma'am," said Tim, as respectfully as if he had received his wages regularly, and had no knowledge whatever of the impecuniosity of the family, to whom he had become an absolute necessity.

"Tim's almost as clever as the governor," said Mr. Sleaford, jun, toasting his slippered toes on the fender.

"I wish he were not so familiar," said Patty, a young

lady of eighteen, with blue eyes and a delicately fair complexion.

Patty, to all appearance, was a pale pinky nonentity, who spent her life in copying water-color studies of impossible sunsets.

Her sister Emily had all the brain of the family, and most of its good looks, too. She was three years older than Patty, and twenty shades darker; slight in figure, hazel eyes, dark-brown hair, and a touch of obstinacy in her moral composition. That was indicated in a well-shaped, declicate mouth, and a firm, steady eye. She was not pretty, but she was certainly interesting, and she nursed in secret something like a contempt for father, mother, brother, and sister, and that was the one great trouble of her life.

"Tim has the privilege of an old and tried servant," said Mrs. Sleaford, who noticed a not altogether complimentary expression in Emily's face in reference to Tom's remark.

"The privilege of a fellow-conspirator," said Emily, not angrily, but with something like a sneer.

"Emily, why will you make yourself so disagreeable?" said Mrs. Sleaford. "You ignore the little fictions of life, as if they were not a necessary part of one's existence, and you despise what is equally important, a reasonable amount of keeping up appearances. I can't think where you get your absurd notions from."

"What is the good, mamma, of going into debt for this mourning; you will only be worried to death for the money, and father and Tim will have to lie against each other to the man who, six months from now, will come every day for weeks to serve father with a writ," said Emily, placing upon a file several accounts which had come by post.

"You are so disgustingly prosaic, and you have no hope in the future," said Mr. Sleaford, jun.

"I am the domestic bookkeeper; I know how much we owe, and how little we can pay, and I am wearied of a hollow pretence of prosperity which brings its daily humiliations."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Sleaford, in a tone a little higher and quicker than her customary drawl.

"I mean exactly what I say, mamma, The butcher has threatened to stop supplies; the gas-man told Tim he would cut off the gas to-morrow if the last half-year's account is not paid to-day: the regimental tailor of Captain Tom Sleaford, of the Tower Hamlets Volunteers, have served

papa with a County Court summons: and now you are going to prepare a greater worry than all to succeed these troubles, when we have got through them, as I suppose we shall, with the usual noise and fluster, like a cat getting through a skylight."

Emily hung the file in a corner of a bureau devoted to the financial affairs of the household, locking it with a smart click, and was about to continue her remarks, when Tom Sleaford looked up from the *Times*, which was borrowed for an hour for a penny every morning, and asked what Emily was "rowing about."

"I am not 'rowing,'" said Emily.

"Yes, you are," said Patty, with her white, doughy arm round her mother's waist, for Mrs. Sleaford had begun to cry.

"Now look here, Em, I won't have it," said Tom. "This would be the happiest family going if you didn't always break in on its peace with your matter-of-fact saws and maxims."

"Peace," said Emily, "may be too dearly bought; we have had enough of what you call peace, which simply means letting things drift into a war, to be fought at a disadvantage when the time comes."

"Go it, Em; but don't expect me to stop and hear you. Fred Tavener may like that kind of amusement; I don't, so I'm off," said Tom, proceeding to pull on his boots.

"There is no need to say anything against Mr. Tavener," said Mrs. Sleaford, languidly; "he is a very kind and gentleman-like person."

"I've nothing to say against him."

"When you have, Tom, say it to his face," said Emily. "He is not particularly clever, but he does work hard, Tom, and——"

"I don't, I suppose you mean; all right, Em, I'm going to be a schemer, like the governor. Work's a mistake; wit's the thing, Em, wit."

"Then I'm sorry for you, Tom," said Emily.

"Thank you," replied Tom, drawing himself up.

"There, don't be angry," said the girl, quickly, and putting her arms round his neck; "it is not your fault if you are an idle, good-for-nothing fellow."

"Shan't make it up; you're always going on at a chap," said Tom; "luckily Fitzroy Square isn't the only corner in

the world, and I know half-a-dozen places where they don't tell me I'm a brute, and then try to make things straight by pretending they mean it kindly."

CHAPTER III.

GOING INTO MOURNING.

Tom walked out of the room, and presently the hall-door banged, and his tall figure, with its light moustache and its brown ulster coat, could be seen stalking past the window and disappearing in the fog.

"It is really unkind," said Mrs. Sleaford; "very unkind, to send the dear boy out to walk about the streets of London on a day like this."

"Just because Emily can't control her temper," remarked Patty, in a calm aside.

"I was not out of temper," said Emily; "and that idea of walking the streets of London is too absurd. Why, Tom has a dozen places to go to. Men are never at a loss—bars, clubs, billiard-rooms—there is no end to the seductive amusements that make it easy for Tom to resent the slightest discomfort at home, and pretend he is driven out."

Emily was quite right. Tom's life outside Fitzroy Square was to him full of pleasant incidents.

He knew four barmaids by their Christian names. They always put themselves out of the way to humor his whims. The best of everything was at his command at four of the finest bars in London. Not that he traded upon the complaisance of these pleasant ladies. He paid his score. Some men who condescend to captivate the Bacchanalian graces forget to pay for their drinks. At present Tom was not quite a sneak; he was only vain and idle, but he only wanted the opportunity to be a villain.

"Walking about the streets of London, mother!—why, Tom has a club on Adelphi Terrace far better furnished than his club in Fitzroy Square."

"What club in Fitzroy Square?"

"This house: home is only a club to Tom. I wish I could take things as coolly."

"Emily hears all about these things from Mr. Tavener," said Patty.

"Never mind how Emily hears, dear; Emily knows that Tom has a club where he can eat and drink, and smoke and order the servants about: where he meets other Toms, who talk over the scandals of the day, and enjoy themselves to their hearts' content. Talk of women! why men are as frivolous and as full of gossip and scandal as the tabbies at a West-End kettledrum."

"Oh, you spiteful thing!" said Patty, looking up out of her doll's eyes, and rubbing them the moment Emily looked towards her.

Mrs. Sleaford burst into tears.

"Why, mother! why, mother!" exclaimed Emily.

"Why, what?" murmured Mrs. Sleaford.

"Why are you crying?"

"Because you are quarrelling."

"We are not doing anything of the kind, dear," said Emily.

"No," said Patty, "we are not."

"I don't like to hear you say things against Tom." Mrs. Sleaford dried her eyes as she spoke.

"I only speak for his own good. I wish he would do something," said Emily, leaving the room.

Tom had been unlucky. His father had obtained appointments for him in several City houses. He had been unable to keep them, because his pride would not endure the demands which mercantile rules made upon it; and in one financial house he had been charged with trading in scrip on the strength of information, the secret of which he was bound in honor, as an official of the establishment, to maintain and respect. The dear boy was now waiting for the development of a company of which he was to be appointed manager: and as his father would be chairman of the board, his duties would be such as a gentleman could perform.

Mrs. Sleaford had talked this matter over with Emily only the day before, and had begged her not to wound poor Tom's feelings by references to his being out of a lucrative position; and Mrs. Sleaford felt that her taunts were, therefore, doubly hard, and more particularlywhen they were all doing their best to keep up a respectable appearance, so that when good fortune really did come back again they would

be in a position to receive it, and hold their own in society as they always had done.

"Yes, dear mamma," said Patty; "don't cry any more; it is very naughty of Emily, but she's only in one of her tempers, and it will soon be all over, and you know what a dear girl she is when she's not put out."

"I'm sure I wish she would marry."

"So do I."

"Some rich man."

"Yes."

"Not Mr. Fred Tavener!"

"No, because he's poor. That's the reason Emmy's cross, I think."

"He's a very nice young man, if he were only well off."

"But what should we do without Emmy?"

"I don't know. We shouldn't have these continual scenes, at all events.'

"We should have nothing, I fear, mamma."

"The carriage will be ready in ten minutes," said Tim, entering the room in his neat livery of chocolate and gold, and retiring without waiting for a reply.

"Go, dear, and ask Emily if she will come with me, or leave me to give the order myself. She knows how ignorant I am about the quality of things, and how easily I am imposed upon," said Mrs. Sleaford, wiping her eyes, and kissing her youngest born.

"I will make her go," replied Patty, in her slow, unimpassioned manner; and, sure enough, she returned with the good news that Emily would be ready in ten minutes.

A brougham drove up to the door. Tim was on the box in his livery. His gloves were white, and his eye was full of sly mourning. He had already spoken of the sad news which had come by post. The driver, while the horse was being put in, had reported to the owner that Mr. Sleaford had been left twenty thousand pounds by a distant relative.

Tim stepped down and opened the door for his mistress and her eldest daughter.

"An' it's sorry I am this day," he said, in a respectful whisper, as he turned the handle of the brougham and touched his hat with an air of solemnity that made Miss Emily Sleaford laugh.

"Really, Emily, if you did not know Uncle Martin, his death need not make you merry."

"No, mamma; it is Tim who makes me merry."

"Then I would try and discover a more refined object for mirth."

"There is no fun in refinement, mamma."

"You are the strangest girl!" said Mrs. Sleaford. "I sometimes wonder whether you are my daughter or not."

"Yes, you have a curious choice of subjects to wonder about, dear, silly mamma. Don't you wonder how we are going to get Smith Brothers to trust us with all this mourning which you are going to order?"

"No, because you are with me. If I were alone, that would be a different matter."

"Then let me go home, dear."

"No, you have taken everybody and everything into your hands to manage, Emily; and I have got to rely on you so much that I declare I feel quite foolish by myself, and I'm sure you wouldn't like the material I should select for you."

"Ah, well, here we are, dear. I'd just as soon be a forlorn hope facing a battery of guns as tell that wretched shopwalker to book our order," said Miss Sleaford.

As if Tim had heard the remark he came to the door, and, looking knowingly at her, said,—

"Excuse me a minnit, mem. I'll pave the way for ye, and make things as smooth as a greased rainbow. Please to wait till I come back to ye."

Tim entered the imposing warehouse of Messrs. Smith Brothers, and returned beaming.

"Faith, and ye'll forgive me, Miss Emmy. I just whispered in the long ear of that baste as walks about the shop that I'd expect a good tip for bringing of you to give them an order, seeing as your uncle, the great squire, had died an' left ye half a county, and a fortune in goold as was too big to count; an', be jabers, he said I should be paid 'handsomely."

Presently Mrs. Sleaford and her daughter were sitting in the most solemn of the heavy mourning departments of Smith Brothers, whose assistants waited on them with bated breath and whispering humbleness.

CHAPTER IV.

SCHEMES AND SCHEMERS

MEANWHILE the head of the house of Sleaford had reached the scene of his business hopes, the offices of the Financial Society, which occupied a suite of three rooms on the third floor back of a palatial building in Birchin Lane, the company consisting of Mr Maclosky Jones and his two clerks.

The most imposing room of the three was the waiting room, which was hung with maps of estates, plans of collieries, sketches of mining-shafts, and a fancy picture of a proposed cemetery in the neighborhood of Blackheath, together with a still more florid picture of an aquarium and concert-rooms on the Thames, at Richmond.

On the marble mantelpiece were sundry specimens of lead, gold, and silver ore, and in a recess near the window, was a handsome desk, at which a clerk sat addressing envelopes.

This anteroom was the rendezvous of Mr. Maclosky Jones's friends and hangers-on, and here came every day Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford, one of his most influential confederates in the art of promotion.

Mr. Sleaford was always received with great respect by the humble clerk of the outer room, and with equal consideration by Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, a gentleman of distinguished manners, and with friendly cordiality by the other city gentlemen who formed the financial circle that revolved upon the managerial axis of Maclosky Jones.

These lights of the outer room were always talking of mines, foreign loans, and industrial enterprises in a large and magnificent way; and though they could not sometimes have mustered a sufficient sum of money among them to pay a cab fare to the West End, yet they spoke of hundreds of thousands of pounds with an air of confidence that might have led a stranger to suppose them to be all millionaires, and in the thick of the world's business.

Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson was a gentleman of peculiarly varied experience. He had been twice married, and once

divorced, his last wife having been the third daughter of an Irish earl.

It was understood that he had run through two fortunes; and this must have been true, because he continually spoke of the occurrence.

He had intimate relationship with the Press, and had, indeed, for years past, been the most anonymous of the leader-writers in the *Times*—so he said.

He was a calm, self-possessed gentleman of five and thirty, well dressed, well shaved, and well buttoned up. You might have mistaken him for a military officer in undress, his scrupulously brushed frock-coat was so tightly buttoned, and his slight black moustache was so neatly cut and waxed.

One of those daring weekly journals which had recently sprung up in the City had called him a guinea-pig director, and a swindler, in an article on the Persian Gold Mining Company's prospectus, and had charged him with being the life and soul of the Financial Society, which had attempted to palm off upon the public for one hundred thousand pounds property not worth five; but Mr. Jones Maclosky, the manager of the Syndicate, had written and denied all knowledge of Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson until he was introduced to him in connection with the scheme in question; and Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson had served the journal in question with a writ for libel, which he intended to carry no further; and so the financial critic had not done the damage he hoped to do, although the Persian scheme had fallen dead, and left Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford and his anteroom friends jointly responsible for a large advertising and printing bill.

"Let us hope we shall have more success with the graver scheme," said Robinson, between the whiffs of a cigarette, on this particular day

"The public must die," rejoined Sleaford, "the public must be buried, and a cemetery at Blackheath should be indeed a go; and I think it will, I think it will."

"We have got the concession of the land, and we are assured of Parliamentary sanction; we have secured a young gentleman who has consented to pay five hundred pounds towards preliminary expenses on being guaranteed the secretaryship; and to-day we are to have an interview with a gentleman from Paddington, whom we propose to appoint our mural sculptor, and gravedigger-in-chief. It is through his influence that we have obtained the concession

of land, and he will agree to give the company a share in the profits of his contracts."

At this moment, there arrived the very person of whom they were speaking, Mr. Harry Brayford, a hearty, genial looking fellow, of middle-age, with a pair of mutton-chop whiskers, a pair of ruddy cheeks, and a smack of country life in his manner, toned down by a black suit of clothes, and a pair of black kid gloves, very thick, and much too long.

"Mr. Brayford, I am glad to see you," said Robinson; "allow me to introduce you to my friend, and your friend I hope from this day, Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford, of Fitzroy Square."

"Good morning, sir," said Brayford, a little disconcerted at finding himself in the presence of so stately a personage as Jeremiah, who gave him a solemn and dignified recognition.

"I will go and see if Mr. Maclosky Jones will be long before he is disengaged," said Robinson, and he disappeared behind the green baize door that led to the shrewd Maclosky's room, where the shrewd Maclosky had been engaged for at least two hours, five deep, as the outer clerk said but really with no other companions than the morning papers, which he was reading in a quiet, leisurely way.

"Yours is a somewhat melancholy profession, Mr. Brayford," said Sleaford, when he was left alone with the newcomer, and the humble clerk who addressed envelopes, and who enjoyed the elevated style of Sleaford's conversation, "though I suppose we can get used to death, and, indeed, may come, so to speak, to take a friendly interest in the 'all conquering monarch,' as he has been not inaptly termed."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Mr. Brayford, good-humoredly. "Death is a larky cove sometimes—beg pardon, I was thinking of something else—I mean, certainly, by all means."

"I gather by your manner that custom is really second nature, and that success in any profession depends on taking to it in earnest."

"Success depends on plenty of rehearsals," said Brayford. "I mean in attention to your business, with punctuality and despatch, and upon the refined character of your epitaphs. Did you ever write an epitaph, Mr. Sleaford?"

"Never, sir, though I may say that I have contributed

with more or less success to the literature of my country, and added not a little to the development of a true appreciation of gold, from a metallic, moral, natural, and financial point of view."

"Yes, no doubt," said Mr. Brayford; "I have not done anything in that line, though I do dabble a little. Not to speak of that, but to keep to the business in hand, I think epitaphography is a great art. I have been insisting lately on mingling modern poetry with Biblical lore. Now, sir, I think a three-act epitaph—as I call it—is the most successful of all."

Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford looked surprised, and nodded encouragingly to Brayford.

"That's my patent—my own idea—a three act epitaph; what I mean is, that it should be on this principle—three ideas in prose or rhyme—and I call the first a sigh, the second a tear, the third a sob. That's reducing the thing to a science, and what I tell all my customers, whether I write the epitaph or not, is, let there be a sigh, a tear, and a sob in it, and you'll bring the curtain down with a round—no, that's not exactly what I mean, but the sob is the idea to conclude with."

Mr. Brayford's face grew red with the excitement of this professional conversation, and he smiled blandly upon Mr. Sleaford, who looked more puzzled than before, not only because he was a little at sea owing to Mr. Brayford's mixed metaphors, but furthermore on account of this quiet-looking, country mannered gentleman taking the entire conversation into his own hands.

"To come to business, Mr. Brayford. You are, perhaps, not aware that I am to be chairman of this Cemetery Company. Pardon me, sir, don't interrupt me for a moment." (Brayford was just going to dash in and carry off the conversation again.) "I am glad to have met you, and there is a peculiar appropriateness in the encounter, for only this morning I was made acquainted with the death of a relative of mine in Lincolnshire."

"What part of the county, may I ask?"

Mr. Brayford was a Lincolnshire man, and could not resist this interruption.

"The Marsh," said Mr. Sleaford.

"Pardon me again," rejoined Brayford, rising from his seat; "the name?"

"Squire Martin." said Sleaford.

"Good gracious! you don't say so," said Brayford, his face positively beaming; "why, I knew him, sir, well when I was a boy—used to go down there with my father to shoot snipe; and my father hoped to have buried him, but no such luck. Fact is, I have only recently come into the mural and cemetery business; my father was in it, I was not; but the dear old boy, after burying all his friends, had to be buried himself at last, and I was his heir, do you see, and he was proud of his profession, and he bound me to carry it on; so here I am, or here we are again, to quote a familiar line. Well, dear me, dear me; and I suppose Miss Crosby, his niece, will come in for the chink, and she'll marry John Kerman, and—well, bless me, this is news—this is news! They'll bury him at the old church in the Marsh. It's not been in the *Times*."

"Was in this morning's paper," said Sleaford, now more surprised than ever.

"Then the Wonner missed it; that's a shilling off your pocket money, old hawk-eye, and no pit ticket for the pantomime. Mr. W. is my chief clerk, does nothing but examine the obituary notices and circularize. A pretty Wonner to have missed Squire Martin! The proverb is indeed true, that one goes from home to hear news. I'll make an example of you this once. Excuse me, sir" (addressing the humble clerk), "have you any telegraph forms?"

"Yes sir," said the youth, delighted to get down from the desk. "Here y'are, sir."

"I hope you'll pardon this little wait, sir," said Mr. Brayford, adding in a whisper to himself, "Interval of five minutes for refreshment," and rapidly writing a telegram to Manor Farm, stating that he would arrive there by mail train, hoping to be honored with instructions to carry out the last mournful offices for his late father's late friend.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Brayford, when I venture to observe that you are a most singular person; I had quite expected to find a gentleman in your profession imbued with its gloom, touched with its woe, enduring with a sigh its sad surroundings; but I suppose it may be in your case as Watts so tenderly puts it—

"'Not seldom is the soul depressed
While tearless is the eye;
For there are woes that wring the breast
When feelings, fount is dry."

We are continually learning in this world, and I am really delighted to be made acquainted, through you, with another phase of industrial society; and the more so that you were acquainted with my dear and esteemed relative, the great landowner of Lincolnshire."

Mr. Brayford was just calling Jeremiah Sleaford, Esquire, an old fool under his breath, as a prelude to some flattering remark aloud, when Maclosky's private secretary announced that Mr. Maclosky Jones was now disengaged, and would like to see Mr. Sleaford and Mr. Brayford; whereupon these two gentlemen, after the usual courtesy of offering to each the precedence, entered the private room of the Financial Society, Mr. Brayford bringing up the rear, and executing, to the utter amazement of the humble clerk outside, the last steps of a fandango so lightly that he did not attract the attention of Sleaford, or the inner clerk, who entered the financial sanctum with more than usual solemnity.

CHAPTER V.

ASHES TO ASHES."

Autumn lay low on the Lincolnshire marshes. The mists of October paraded in ghost-like battalions to the sea. There was no wind, though the sedges in the dykes murmured to each other in saddened whispers. Autumn brooded over the broad flats, and all the land was sad and silent.

That sombre procession, winding through the reeking landscape to the old church between the Manor Farm and Skegnes, might have been set down as part of the season's tokens of decay and death.

It was a funeral—a black, unpicturesque funeral—at which the mourners walked; and the least interested of the bodies present rested under a pall on the shoulders of six stalwart yeomen.

The single bell in the square church tower, which, in the old days, had, with the now disused lantern, served as a warning and a beacon to mariners on the German Ocean, sobbed aloud. Presently the mists of autumn solemnly

took possession of the funereal cavalcade, and it disappeared in the distance; but the bell still tolled on in dull, mournful tones that could be heard at Manor Farm, where the baked meats already awaited the return of the procession, when it had finished burying old Squire Martin, the hardest, shrewdest, most tyrannical and best respected farmer between Lincoln and the coast.

It is a blessing that they built good, solid houses in the sombre flats of Lincolnshire; square, flat, broad-spreading houses, with thick walls and great wide fireplaces. It is a joy and a blessing on autumn days and winter nights to see the fire blaze and hear it crackle on the broad hearthstone; to see the red light fall upon the old oak settle in the inglenook; to see the glare rest upon shining dish-covers, upon brass saucepans, upon the polished clock case, upon the white scrubbed deal dresser, and upon the blinking sheep-dog that dozes by the fender. Autumn may sigh without; winter may beat against the windows; but there is a summer of comfort in the old kitchen of the Manor Farm, which defies wind and weather; and the odor of the wood logs, as they crackle and smoulder in the grate, is equal to the perfume of 'Araby the blest."

Manor Farm was a wide old straggling house, built of stone, and thatched as closely and as well as the great wheat stacks that towered up over the farm-buildings close by. Manor Farm did not appear to be affected in any way by the dark autumn weather. Indeed, Manor Farm looked more cheerful than usual. The blinds were all drawn up; some of the bedroom windows were open, and in the darkness of the autumn twilight the fire could be seen flashing beneath the kitchen door. Inside they were preparing a feast. Mrs. Kester, the housekeeper, had not been so busy for years as she was on this day, when our history commences. Old Goff, the shepherd, who had grown gray in Squire Martin's service, sat by the fire in speechless wonder at Mrs. Kester's activity.

"Come, bustle about, lad," she said, as she placed decanters of port and sherry on the great white dresser, among sirloins of beef and fat hams, "thou's done nowt this mornin' but sit there and mope."

"It's the grief, Kester, the grief," said Goff, looking into the fire, and shading his eyes from the glare with a broad, bony, wrinkled hand.

"More like it's the drink," said Kester, turning her hard

face upon him with a cynical expression about the mouth and a look of pity in the eyes. Kester was noted for her sharp sayings and her kind heart.

"No, it ain't that," said Goff, reflectively, as if answering his own thoughts rather than the sour remark of Kester, whom he had seen daily since she came there a child to help in the dairy, and whose cutting tongue had been familiar to him as the bleating of his sheep.

"Why beant the oud measter dead, and beant this his funeral?"

"And what of that?" said Kester, still busy with her meats and pies and drinks. "Thou'rt reight glad I reckon to get thy whack of grub and ale for once without a growl and a curse. Grief! I should think so, when thou art goin' to change thy hard measter for the kindest and best missus that ever drew breath."

"But he weren't such a bad measter after all," said Goff. "He were a brute like, but he were a farmer, and that's sayin' summat in these days, when shopkeepers from Lincoln and Burgh think they can come and till the soil reight off, and foine gentlemen do it by deputy, and think it's to be done by readin' books and speechifying at meetins'."

"Well, come, that's a pretty long speech for thee, howsumdever," said Kester, "and thou shalt have a drink to stop thy mouth, at any rate."

Kester poured from a big stone jug a mug of foaming ale, which Goff put steadily to his lips.

While he drew breath for a second and last draught, he twirled the mug artistically round, so that the liquor became a whirpool with dancing heads at the top, and when the swing of the ale threatened to hurl the foam over the edge of the cup, he gulped it down and smacked his lips.

"Well, squire weren't as good as his ale, Kester," he said, as he handed her the empty mug.

"Good!" said Mrs. Kester. "Who were he good to?"

"I dunno exactly, but I likes to speak well of them as is dead."

"Speak truth on 'em, Goff; speak truth, dead or alive."

"Yes, that's reight; but if measter were a bit of a tyrant like, a dammin' and goin' on at least thing as went wrong, why he were good as th' world goes to young measter John."

"You think so?" Kester replied, interrogatively.

"He gave him a hoame and his clothes, and pocket-money."

"And made him work like a farm-laborer to pay for them."

"But John were not his own kith and kin, Kester, and it wor only right he should work."

"John wur son of his only friend in the world—a friend as did Squire Martin a service once when he needed it, and he promised to bring up his friend's lad when his father died, and he has brought him up wi' a vengeance."

Goff argued more in a spirit of opposition than from principle or conviction, unless the proverb, "Say no ill of the dead" was moving him to dispute with Kester, who liked a wrangle, and who had beaten the old squire in many a battle of words, at the end of which she had always given notice to leave her place, and never once attempted to carry her warning to completion.

"But, come now, Kester, you mun own he wur kind to Miss Jane."

Goff thrust his hands into his corduroy breeches and looked up defiantly.

"Kind! I should think so. And who could help it?"

"Not me, nor anybody as I know on," said Goff, cowed, and now resolved to give in.

"If he loved anything, he loved Miss Jane. Perhaps she took after him in his looks, perhaps because she tended him and coddled him and saved him expense, and kept things straight, wrote his letters, kept his books. And, what's more, 'cos she was the only relation he had in the wide world as I ever heard on, except some stuck-up folk in London as claimed to kinship wi' him last Chrismas, when they wrote and was sorry he was ill, they said, and sent that barrel of oysters as none of us could open, and which Squire smashed with the coal-hammer."

Goff laughed at the memory of that famous scene with the oysters, but before his guffaw was well out another memory of the absence of its proper exercise troubled him.

"Hey! Howd hard, Kester? I've forgot to tell thee. Talking o' them relations, that's what I ha' been trying to think on ole th' day. They've come!"

"Who's come?" exclaimed Kester, smoothing her apron, and sitting down for the first time since breakfast. "Who's come?"

She sat opposite Goff, and looked him full in the face.

He slowly buttoned his velveteen coat and stood up.

"Why, dang it, I must be soft to ha' forgot. Why, them Lundon folk; they cum to the Crown at Burgh by Lundon train last night—a whole heap on'em, wi' rugs and luggage enough to stock ole the Marsh; and they were a-sayin' on——"

At this moment there appeared on the scene an apparition which startled both Goff and Kester.

CHAPTER VI.

TIM MALONEY INTRODUCES HIMSELF TO MRS. KESTER.

THE apparition was a pair of twinkling eyes, a shock of brown hair confined under a tall hat with a black cockade, a black coat adorned with livery buttons, and a smile that was as defiant as the flourish with which Tim Maloney took off his hat and saluted Mrs. Kester.

"And who are you, and where do you come from, and what do you want?" was the explicit and complete inquiry of Mrs. Kester, as Tim advanced to the centre of the room.

"I am Tim Maloney, the confidential man of Jeremiah Sleaford, Esq., Fitzroy Square, London, and I want you, if you are, as I conclude, Mrs. Kester, and long life to you."

"Well, here I am, and what do you want me for with your Irish blarney?"

"My governor, his son the captain, and Mrs. Sleaford are coming to rade the will, and will you be so kind as to accommodate them as becomes the oldest relatives of the defunct? I'll just help myself, if you've no objection."

Tim laid his hand upon a decanter of sherry.

"Let that wine alone, it's for your betters," said Kester.

"Me betthers! And who may they be? The illigant family I've left at the Crown, the other side o' this bog-trotting marsh?"

Tim drank a glass of wine in spite of Kester's protest.

"I've got no betthers, and why the devil I consent to wear this livery is a mystery to me, seein' as I'm really a

citizen of the United States of America, and expect one day to be the President."

"I thought you were an Irishman," said Kester.

"Oirish, is it?" said Tim, in an unmistakable brogue. "Divil a bit, American ivry inch of me; I'm only over here for political reasons, a mission which will be heard of—but no matther, as you were sayin', the distinguished family of the Sleafords will be here soon, and I want to see their rooms, and order dinner for them."

Goff looked at Kester, and the old sheep-dog stretched himself, and sniffed inquiringly at the ambassador of the Sleafords.

"Why, one would think Manor Farm and lands belonged to your measter, the way he sends his orders," said Kester, looking at Tim all over, and taking the decanter from his hand just as he was about to fill for himself another glass.

"Be jabers, perhaps it does," said Tim.

"What!" exclaimed Goff, speaking for the first time; "thou'd better keep thy jabers for Lundon, my lad, or thou may get thyself into trouble."

Kester nodded approvingly at Goff, and put a chump of wood on the fire with an emphasis that sent thousands of sparks flying up the chimney.

"Now, look here, my friends," said Tim, taking a seat, and touching his hat thoughtfully, "shure an' I've not come here to make myself disagreeable to ye, but doesn't it seem likely that my people, the Sleafords, bein' related to the deceased, he may have left them his estates?"

"If you ask me," said Goff, "I should think—"

"But I don't ask you," said Tim leaning back and watching Mrs. Kester, who stood eying him in no friendly spirit. "I don't presume to ax ye anything of the kind; it is simply my intention to tell ye that the Sleafords, of Fitzroy Square, London, have come down to hear the will read."

"Then they can trapass back again for anything they'll get," said Kester.

"But ye don't bear any malice to me?" cried Tim, with a show of deference, which he suddenly found desirable in presence of Kester's threatening glances.

"Malice! When we tread on a beetle we don't bear any malice; we just want the thing out of the way, and that's all," said Kester.

Tim leaped from his seat, and Goff laughed aloud, and hitting his thigh a sounding slap, said,—

"That were a good 'un, and how did Mr. Flibbertigibbet like it?"

Tim said he hadn't the honor of Mr. Flipperty's—what's his name's—acquaintance.

"Here, sit ye down," said Kester; "Lincolnshire folk weant be inhospitable to a stranger, and you can't help it, I reckon, that yer master's a fool and a grab-all."

"My sentiments, Mrs. Kester," said Tim, re-seating himself, and extending his hand towards the sherry, but only to make Kester put the decanter further from his reach.

Kester bustled about while she talked, cutting thick slices of bread and cake, putting artful decorations of parsley on the ham and beef, dusting dishes, and patting the salt down in the great silver salt-cellars.

She wore a big coarse apron over a black merino dress, that fitted her portly figure. Her hair was black as night, though she was a woman of forty-five, and there was hardly a wrinkle in her healthy, olive-hued cheeks. Her shapely arms were bared to the elbow, indicating a figure that at one time must have been perfect.

She had been a widow for twenty years, though she might have married half the yeomen in the Marsh.

"No, she had had one good husband," she said, "and she'd never run the risk of getting a bad one, for fear she'd be tempted to kill him." What she had seen of married life outside her own experience made her come to the conclusion that some men had had a narrow escape, because she could no more stand to be put upon and beaten by a man than she could fly, and she thanked Heaven she had had a good husband, for whom she would have laid down her life, just as she would now for Miss Jane Crosby, who was better than the best man that ever stepped, and deserved a prince for a husband if there was a prince worthy of her, which she doubted very much.

"Now, look here, young mister, what's your name?"

"Tim Maloney," said Tim, with a fascinating smile, which spread right across his face like a gleam of light upon a watery landscape.

"Now listen, Mister Tim Maloney."

"Yes, ma'am," said Tim.

"Everybody knows how Squire Martin has left his property. It's all for his niece, Miss Jane, and it's all to be give to her as soon as folks come from funeral, in about an hour from this."

Goff took his seat in front of the fire once more, and nodded assent to all Mrs. Kester said, while Shep blinked his acquiescence also.

"And everybody knows what Miss Crosby's goin' to do with it. She'll marry John Kerman and settle down in the old house they have helped to keep and make sunshine for, ever since house can remember them."

"Then will ye be after telling me that Mr. Sleaford is out of the will, and there is no chance of the young captain marrying the heiress?" asked Tim.

"Young fiddlestick," said Kester, scornfully; "not the least. She'll marry John Kerman, the son of th' owd squire's friend, and fond on him, as all th' Marsh knows; he's about the only one as don't see it right out, the only one as don't understand his own happiness, or how well his bread is buttered; though make no mistake, he's a reight manly fellow, trodden down a good deal by a hard master; but he's got true Lincolnshire spirit, and they'll make the finest couple of any two in the whole county. Now you know as much as your betters, and if you're not the fool you look, you'll just behave yourself accordingly, for here comes my missus—get up on your feet and be respectful."

CHAPTER VII.

DISCOUNTING THE FUTURE.

With the appearance of Miss Crosby in the kitchen, carriage wheels were heard coming along the drive in front of the house, and Tim, touching his red head, said, "Beg pardon, miss, my people," and disappeared.

Jane looked at Kester for an explanation.

"It be Sleafords, from London, as says they be relations and cum to read will,' said Kester, wiping her hands upon her apron, previous to taking it off.

"Yes, I have heard uncle Martin mention them; and don't you remember, two years ago, young Mr. Sleaford, the captain as he was called, coming here to shoot?"

"Think I do remember summat of the sort," said Kester.

A loud knock at the front door interrupted the conversation. Miss Crosby asked Mrs. Kester to go at once and show the visitors into the front parlor.

Mrs. Kester silently obeyed, and Goff stood, hat in hand, by the inglenook.

"My service to you, can I do anything?" he said.

"Yes," replied Kester, returning, "go and help yon whipper-snapper Irish fellow to get the luggage in, for these Sleafords have enough to fill best bedroom."

Jane was not accustomed to receive strange company, and she felt considerably embarrassed for the moment. It was a sufficient tax upon her that she held the chief position as mourner and manager of the house on so solemn an occasion. She had been the only person in the family or in the parish who had felt the death of her uncle as a subject for sorrow; and even she had found consolation in the fact that he was a very old man, and had lived, as the parson said, beyond the allotted age. Moreover, the duties of her new and responsible position had prevented her from dwelling too much upon the melancholy event, and the secret whispering of her heart told her that there was no longer a barrier between her and the man she loved. John Kerman had had a hard life. He should be miserable no longer. When the proper period of black was over, and she could put on half-mourning, the day might be fixed, and John should be master of the Manor Farm and all the land which uncle Martin had left her. All this was in Jane Crosby's mind, not quite as clearly as we have put it, but it was there, and the feeling that she had the power to compensate Jack for all the troubles of his life, and the happy consciousness of her deep and sincere love for him, surrounded her with an atmosphere that did not belong to the general gloom attending a funeral. Not that Jane was insensible of the sadness of death, come it soon or late, for she had wept bitter tears over the old man; she had sat alone in a quiet room upstairs where he had lain; sat alone in the moonlight and prayed by the side of the great white bed where they had placed him, with his poor arms humbly folded across his breast. But she was young, and her time had to come; he was old, and his day was over; and now he had gone. The room where he had been, the room which she crept by at night, the room which people entered on tiptoe, the room which had begun to be ghostly, was once more open. The blinds were drawn, and all the neighbors

were coming back from the funeral to eat and drink in a solemn kind of way it is true, but the change from the first awful surprise of death was great, and occupation had lifted a load from the mind of the heiress, to whom everybody now paid an excess of respect and attention.

When she entered the front parlor or drawing-room, she found Jeremiah Sleaford, Esq., Mrs. Sleaford, and Mr. Tom Sleaford, all attired in the most scrupulous black.

"Miss Crosby, I presume," said Sleaford in a suppressed voice of sympathy and admiration. "We are your relations from town, your only relatives in the world, I believe, though distant—twenty-fourth cousins or something of that kind; but no matter, blood is thicker than water. Permit me, Mrs. Sleaford, my wife, and Captain Sleaford, my son, who has, he tells me, the honor of a previous introduction."

"I think we have met once," said Jane, a little confused by the solemn pomposity of Mr. Sleaford.

Mrs. Sleaford bowed, Captain Sleaford bowed, and Jeremiah Sleaford, Esq., continued to talk.

"Melancholy event that brings us here, but melancholy events of this kind knit the living still closer together; in this case the deceased, as you will find, was most anxious that it should be so—most anxious, my dear Miss Crosby. We have been to the church, but we did not stay to witness the ceremony at the grave. Mrs. Sleaford is peculiarly sensitive, and I thought it best to come on to the farm and see you, for naturally you may require advice at such a time, and as our dear deceased relative insisted upon me drawing his last will and testament, I am here in double trust as it were."

Mr. Sleaford rubbed his hands and sighed.

"You didn't visit Uncle Martin during his lifetime?" Miss Crosby remarked.

"Not lately, not lately," said Sleaford; "always on the best of terms, but moving in different spheres, yet the observation is merited as a commentary on our present grief, but we could not well come without being invited. My son, the captain, was down here three years ago, and I had the pleasure of carrying a gun on this estate before you were born, my dear—before you were born. And as for Tom, he would have been only too delighted to have come again, for he has done nothing but talk of you ever since, the rogue."

A politic falsehood. Jane was on a visit at Burgh

during Tom's visit, and she only met him at the railway station as he was leaving for London. Jeremiah Sleaford, Esq., had often tried to make Tom talk of the girl, but Tom had not remembered much about her, and his father had always held forth her chief attraction to be her inheritance of her uncle's money.

"Will you take anything?" asked Jane, in her homely way, seeing no other retreat from compliments that gave her no pleasure, and not caring at that moment to enter into the question of a relation to herself, however remote, seeing that this was the first time it had been seriously mentioned in her presence.

"Thank you, no," said Mr. Sleaford. "If you will allow the maid to show me to my room, I shall feel greatly obliged."

An inquiring look was Jane's only reply.

"We propose to remain here until to-morrow," said Mrs. Sleaford.

"Yes, certainly, my dear Jane," said Jeremiah, smiling benignantly on Miss Crosby; "we may have more important and interesting business to settle than you dream of."

"I will send Mrs. Kester to you, madam," said Jane; "she will attend to your wants."

"Thank you very much," said Sleaford, nudging Tom, who rushed to open the door for Jane as she left the room.

"A fine young woman—a splendid young woman," said Sleaford; "no idea, I expect, what is in store for her; great mistake in the testator if he has not confided everything to her. Are you in love with her, Tom?"

"No," said Tom, superciliously. "She's a stunning girl, however."

"Too fat," said Mrs. Sleaford.

"No, my dear, not at all; she's a ripe specimen of Lincolnshire beauty, and I shall be proud to have her for a daughter-in-law. I expect you to fall in love with her at once, Tom."

"Anything else to oblige, governor?"

"Yes; if it be possible for you to propose to her before the will is read, do it."

"What! make love at a funeral?"

"Richard the Third did it," said Sleaford *pere*. "I don't see why you should object. Hush! and I'll tell you a secret—the secret—so that you may frame your conduct accordingly. Squire Martin, our dear deceased relation,

has left the bulk of his property to you, Tom Sleaford, the only son of Jeremiah Sleaford, on one condition."

"Yes!" said Mrs. Sleaford and Tom together.

"The condition!" exclaimed Tom, trembling with excitement.

"That you marry Jane Crosby."

"Good heavens!" said Tom.

"And good father," said Jeremiah. "I arranged the whole thing for you."

"And that was the secret," said Mrs. Sleaford, rising and kissing her husband upon the forehead.

"It was," said Jeremiah; "it was."

For a moment they were all more or less overcome by this disclosure of wealth. Jeremiah was the first to rouse himself.

"So now, Tom, you know your cue. Fall in love before the will is read; propose beforehand if you can. Lucky dog! If I had only had such an opening at the outset of my career!"

Mrs. Kester announced that Mr. Sleaford's room was ready, whereupon Jeremiah and his lady, as Kester called the original owner of Fitzroy Square, left the parlor, and followed the retreating form of the Lincolnshire dame.

Tom strolled into the kitchen, where Jane was sitting in the broad window-seat looking towards the church. The young man obeyed his father at once. He commenced to make love to Miss Crosby in presence of the funeral baked meats.

"Glad I'm not your first cousin, at any rate, Miss Jane."

"Why?"

"Because marriage between first cousins is forbidden, don't you know?"

"I didn't know, sir."

"It's true; so that if I were your first cousin I couldn't lay my hand and heart at your feet."

"I suppose these are London manners, Mr. Sleaford?"

"Yes; we don't beat about the bush in London, and you must have a protector; and I say what I have in my heart before I know what the will contains."

"In your what?"

"My heart."

"Are you serious, Mr. Sleaford?"

"As the grave."

"The grave, cousin; that word ought to recall us to the sad business of to-day."

"It does. But the funeral is over by this time, and we cannot be always regretting the dear departed."

"None of us pretend to regret Uncle Martin much, and I should hardly be believed if I made a fuss, though in my heart I do sorrow over him, for he was kind and good to me; and there's always a certain sorrow about death, though he who has gone might have been unloved by all except me."

"Yes?"

"In his latest hours he was a good, true man; and if he could have seen you talking like this to me he would have taken you by the shoulder and put you out at the door."

Miss Crosby rose and walked to the other end of the kitchen.

"Now I have offended you," said Tom. "I'm awfully sorry; it's my stupidity. I don't know any better, Miss Crosby; don't be annoyed, put it down to my London education; up there everything is a matter of business— funerals, will, courtship, marriage."

"I know nothing of London or London ways, so I take your word for it and forgive you."

"And you don't think any the worse of me?"

"No."

"Not a little bit?"

"No."

"You won't treasure it up against me in the future?"

"No; and I apologize for seeming rough in my answer. Will that do, sir?"

As she spoke the funeral party bustled in. Goff handed the chairs about, Kester busied herself at the spacious kitchen dresser, Mr. Sleaford pushed his way to the head of the table.

"Zancher Brown, take some cake," said Miss Crosby, pushing a plate towards Mr. Brown, a stolid, smiling farmer; "and, Elijah Ward, help yourself," she continued, placing a bottle before a stout Marshite, who said certainly he would, and hoped she found herself well.

Then Mrs. Kester paid similar attention to Mr. Amos Frith, James Johnson, Luke Giles, and half a dozen others; and amidst the clash of knives and forks Jane observed that "Our John" (as she called Mr. John Kerman when she didn't call him Jack) was not of the party. Hurrying

into the best parlor, the better to command a full view of the country, she found Jack standing in the middle of the room.

"Why, John, you look troubled," she said.

"I am a bit," said the young man, with an expression of pain and defiance on his face that was quite foreign to its usual expression.

"Why what have you been doing?" Jane asked, looking into his wondering brown eyes.

"Thinkin,' Jane, thinkin'."

"What, with that dear old head?"

Jane saw that something serious was the matter, and she hoped to dispel the trouble, whatever it might be with badinage. She had always managed John, standing between him and Uncle Martin when to do so was to risk sharing in the blows which more than once the old man would have showered upon his dead friend's only son if she had not stood between them.

"Well, then, I've been tryin' to think."

"Don't do it, lad; leave me to think for you, Jack, as I have always done."

"Aye, that's one o' things as I been tryin' to think on. It's time as I were out o' leadin'-strings, Jane. I've been thinkin' of owd Martin's miserly ways, our hard life here, so narrow-like as compared with these folks as comes from London, with shakin' of hands and how do you do, and such like pleasant ways; and I've been thinkin' of our want of education, at least my want of it, and I thought——"

"Yes, John, yes, you thought."

"Well, now, as owd man's dead and buried, and left you his heiress and all the brass and lands, I thought as I'd somehow become a free man, like other slaves in America as was given their liberty, and I thought——"

"Yes. Well, what more did you think?"

"I don't know as I thought much more, for I got choked like, and came in here, for this idea of freedom got hold on me, and I seemed as if I'd come into my fortune like, just as thou hast."

"Why, Jack, to listen to you, one would think you had been a prisoner here."

"And so I have," said the young man, quickly, pushing his brown hair from off his sunburnt face

"A prisoner to wha'?"

"Duty."

Jane could only look at her companion and friend with surprise. He had never talked like this before. Indeed, she hardly knew that he had more than two ideas in his head: one, a fixed resolve to be kind to her; the other, to work as hard as he could from morning till night.

"To duty, Jane. Uncle Martin, as you call him—and you had right—took us both when we were little better nor children: thee because thou wast his sister's child, me because I was no better than a pauper lad, left destitute by a father who had once befriended Mr. Martin. Well, what happened? We both on us repaid his kindness by harder work than he'd ha' gotten out of others. You labored from custom, and because it's your nature to sacrifice yourself. I did it from duty; accordin' to parson's text, to do your duty in that station of life as it's pleased God to call you; and I felt, when I wur old enough to think about it, that I owed something to the squire, and I've paid him back a hundred times over. He's dead, Jane and I'm free,"

Jack Kerman, stalwart, broad of limb, and open and frank of face, flung himself into a chair, and swung his broad felt hat to and fro.

"Jack, are you mad?" exclaimed the girl, her face flushed, tears in her eyes.

"No lass," said Kerman, with a palpable effort to be calm. "He's left you the property, and I'm glad. Nobody has deserved it like you. He leaves me the world, and I'm not sorry at that. I want to see the world. I want to say good-by, Jane, before I go, and I can say it now."

Jane Crosby staggered for a moment as if she were about to fall.

The man she loved so much that she secretly rejoiced in her prospect of wealth that she might lavish it upon him rushed towards her. She put her hand out to avoid his touch.

"It's nothing John; don't mind me, you've only surprised me a bit, and I'm but a woman after all, though you evidently think I have all the strength of a man. There, do as you think best, Jack. But out of respect to the neighbors, to say nothing of me, perhaps you'll come in and hear the will read."

She left the room, followed presently by Jack Kerman, who was known for his strength and pluck all through the north. He was often called Jack the silent, for he was a young man of few words, and everybody knew that he was

a sort of slave to Squire Martin, protected by Miss Crosby, who made no secret of her admiration for him. The restraint of the master gone just as the young fellow had come to man's estate, John Kerman had communed with the soul within him, and after a long and ardent struggle, his ambition found utterance; not that his ambition was at all clear or defined; it only meant freedom, the desire to go beyond the Lincolnshire marshes, the vague wish of the prisoner who wants to stand on the other side of iron bars, for John Kerman had never been beyond Boston in all his life and there, on market-days, at the inn he had heard commerical travellers talk of the great city of London, and of a world that seemed to beckon him the moment Squire Martin's eyes were no longer upon him, his voice no longer about him, like the slave-driver's whip.

He blundered into the room presently to hear the will read, and to discover, amidst the general consternation of the assembled crowd, that Uncle Martin had in his latter days, prepared a surprise for the Marsh, which speedily became the talk and wonder of the whole county.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WILL FULL OF SURPRISES.

THE fire leaped up the spacious chimney. Shep crouched by the inglenook, and watched the unaccustomed scene. A goodly company sat round the long table. The autumn wind had dispelled the fog, and you could see from the window a wide stretch of flat country.

"Ladies and gentleman," said Mr. Jabez Thompson, of the firm of Thompson & Foxwell, the local solicitors, "I will now, with your permission, perform a melancholy but necessary duty."

"What duty, sir?" asked Mr. Sleaford, observing that Mr. Jabez Thompson produced a parchment.

"That of reading the will of the deceased Ephraim Martin, sir," said Mr. Thompson.

"Indeed! I am here for that purpose," said Mr. Sleaford, but with that amount of coolness which the situation demanded.

"Yes, I expected you were here with some intention of the kind; the defunct led me to infer that you would be here, and he resisted my wish to inform you of the date of his latest will and testament. He discovered the mistake you had made only a month ago, when he took it into his head to call at the bank and read the will afresh."

Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford turned pale, and looked anxiously at Mr. Thompson.

"There is no necessity for alarm, Mr. Sleaford, rest assured; my old client was so rejoiced to find he had time to rectify the error, that he desired to have the matter rest as concerning no one but ourselves."

"Thank you," said Jeremiah. "Will you permit me to look at your document for a moment? I am desirous that this meeting should be perfectly harmonious."

Jabez Thompson handed the will to Mr. Sleaford, who scanned it quickly, and noticing that the date was indeed recent, and the signature of the testator and witnesses evidently in proper order, he gave it back to the local solicitor.

"May I say a word in explanation?"

"Certainly, if you please."

"Ladies and gentleman," said Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford, "pardon this little delay. The truth is, the defunct made a will several years ago, which I expected was his last. Since then it appears he has made another, and I therefore withdraw my pretensions in favor of the latest will and the deceased's most recent solicitor."

A hum of approval went round the table at the frank, honest way in which Mr. Sleaford gave in to Mr. Thompson. Tom and his mother, however, could see that something had gone seriously wrong in regard to the arrangements which Jeremiah Sleaford, Esquire, had been making on the strength of Squire Martin's will. At the same time they were somewhat relieved when they saw the color come back to Jeremiah's cheeks, and felt that confidence was restored in the tone of his voice. Jeremiah alone appreciated the importance of Jabez Thompson's assurance, that "there was no necessity for alarm." The head of the house of Sleaford felt the full force of the escape which the rival lawyer's words implied, and for a moment he was prepared to go back to London contentedly, without being one penny the richer by Squire Martin's death.

"I, Ephraim Martin," began Mr. Thompson, "of Manor

Farm, The Marsh, in the county of Lincoln, do hereby revoke all wills, codicils, and other testamentary dispositions heretofore made by me, and do declare this to be my last will and testament."

"Are the witnesses alive, sir?" asked Mr. Sleaford, unwilling, even in the presence of a possible exposure of his conduct, to lose all control over the proceedings.

"They are. Kester Shaw and William Goff are the witnesses."

"They look alive," said Tom, following the index finger of Mr. Thompson, as it pointed in the direction of the two defunct's head servants.

"It must be a great consolation to our dear cousin to know that they are alive," said Mrs. Sleaford, mildly.

"Certainly, yes, my dear," said Jeremiah.

"If there are no more questions to be asked," said Mr. Thompson, looking round deprecatingly, "I would again proceed to state that——"

"I beg pardon, sir. It may be as well to be informed whether there are any surviving relatives of the deceased who are not present?"

"All the surviving relatives are present, Mr. Sleaford."

"Thank you; it is always awkward when some surviving relative turns up and makes claims afterwards, like Enoch Arden," observed Mr. Sleaford, sighing.

"Or Robinson Crusoe," said Tom.

"I am not aware that Robinson Crusoe ever claimed anything under a will. Your observation is an unnecessary interruption. Pray proceed, Mr. Thompson."

Mr. Sleaford observed an expression of annoyance in the local solicitor's eye that warned him to be careful, and although a score of other questions suggested themselves, he waved his hand for silence, and the reading of the will went on. A thousand pounds each were left to Kester and Goff, a few thousand pounds were bequeathed to the county hospital; small legacies were distributed among neighbors; and then the will recited that Jeremiah Sleaford was quite forgiven the mistake he had made in drawing a former will, "the said Ephraim, feeling that he has not long to live, and desiring to do an act of special grace, in the hope of wiping out some of the brutalities of an embittered life, not only forgives his distant relative, Jeremiah Sleaford, but bequeaths to the said Jeremiah, his heirs, executors, and assigns, the sum of ten thousand pounds, that he may have

no more excuse to make mistakes in wills or other documents."

"Heaven rest his soul," exclaimed Jeremiah Sleaford. "He was a good and just man."

With which remark the head of the household of Fitzroy Square buried his face in his hands to hide his emotion; for he had, by a fraudulent artifice, inserted the name of his own son in the place of that of John Kerman, the importance of which change the reader will presently understand. The testator had not prosecuted or exposed him on making this discovery, but had kept his wicked secret and left him ten thousand pounds, without which aid at this present moment Jeremiah Sleaford would have been ruined for the third time.

No one at the table understood Mr. Sleaford's trouble except the local solicitor, who only paused for a moment in his recitation of the will.

"To my dear niece, Jane Crosby," he continued, "I bequeath the black box marked with my initials, and now in the custody of my solicitor, Jabez Thompson."

"Eh, dear, what's in it?" exclaimed Mrs. Kester, speaking for the first time.

"Here is the key. Miss Crosby can open it if she likes."

Mrs. Kester took the key.

"Shall I open it, Miss Jane?"

"If you please."

The box was easily opened. Every eye was strained towards it. Even Mr. Sleaford looked up.

"A bunch of owd flowers?" said Kester, in amazement, turning the box upside down, and kicking a withered bouquet of violets, which Jane picked up.

"I gave them to Uncle Martin five years ago, on his birthday, with a knife that had a corkscrew in it," she said.

Mr. Sleaford rose solemnly and tapped the box with his gold-headed pencil-case.

"No false bottom, no secret drawers; no, evidently an empty box, a very empty box. What a strange legacy," he said, resuming his seat.

"Then, who's got the brass?" exclaimed Mr. Shaw, who found his tongue now for the first time during the business.

"Listen; I have nearly finished," said Mr. Thompson. "And I give, devise, and bequeath all the other real and

personal estate of which I shall be possessed or entitled at the time of my decease, unto John Kerman——"

The remaining technicalities of the will went for nothing; nobody heard them; the whole company stood upon its feet with astonishment when Jack Kerman was declared to be Squire Martin's heir.

"Miss Crosby retains possession of the Manor Farm for three years," said Mr. Thompson, when the excitement had somewhat subsided; "she cannot be disturbed in any way until that period is concluded; and this, Mr. Kerman, is the only condition attached to the bequest."

In the will which Uncle Martin had previously made, he had stipulated for the marriage of Kerman to his niece, each to enjoy the revenue of the estate, in proportion, for three years, at the end of which all the property to revert to Jane Crosby, unless she had with her own free consent married Kerman; the old man having been long convinced that she had made up her mind to that match and no other; and, judging from the character of Jack's father rather than from any exhibition of individuality in the son, that a dogged pride might prevent him from accepting wealth at the hands of his wife. Mr. Sleaford had dextrously inserted his own son's name in the place of Kerman's, and had contrived to shuffle that spurious will under Martin's pen for signature; this will had lain at the bank as arranged, until recently, when the squire, being very unwell, thought he would ride over to Lincoln and read the document, with a view to some changes which he had had in his mind to make, and which changes were to some extent indicated in that last conversation with his niece. It was then that he discovered Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford's sharp practice, which he had forgiven with a Quixotic generosity that surprised Mr. Jabez Thompson, who knew little or nothing of the squire's early troubles. The old man, when he saw what Sleaford had done, remembered his own temptations in a serious monetary difficulty, relieved by timely aid by Jack Kerman's father. Under the influence of those early days, brought into strong relief by the presentiment that his last harvest home was at an end, he made that last will, which soon became the talk of the county.

Before Mr. Jabez Thompson left the house after reading the will, Jeremiah Sleaford learnt from him that no

other reference could or would be made to the document in which the mistake had been made.

"Indeed," said the local solicitor, "I have forgotten the error, whatever it was; it is no business of mine to remember it, and the deceased did not enter into any minute explanation of it. If the defunct was content to take no further notice of the matter than to cover it with a legacy of ten thousand pounds, and you are satisfied, there is an end to the business—so far as I am concerned, at all events."

Mr. Sleaford assured his professional colleague that the mistake was not so serious as might have at first appeared, but at the same time nothing could exceed the noble, the almost Utopian way in which his relative, Ephraim Martin, had met it, and so, for the present, the two gentlemen parted, Sleaford beside himself with joy at his wonderful escape, and thinking at the moment that he would never again run the risk attending a fishy transaction.

"At the same time," he said, as if his son Tom had read his thought, "there is no harm in our capturing Mr. Kerman."

"Not at all," said Tom. "He's a jolly fellow; uncouth, perhaps, and his dialect is thick; but he can be cured of that."

"He has enough money to cure him of anything," said Mr. Sleaford.

"Am I to go in for Miss Crosby now?" asked Tom. "An old box and a bunch of flowers don't represent much in the city."

"No, Tom, no," said Sleaford; "though she's a deuced fine girl for all that, and I'm sorry for her. Extraordinary man, old Martin—very extraordinary. Befriends his enemies, cuts off his dearest friend with an empty box."

"Yes, by Jove! it's the rummest go out."

"Ask Mr. Kerman to come to town with us. It will be a change for him. You can show him London. We'll make him a director of the Cemetery Board; it will be doing him a kindness."

"All right; I'll take him to my tailor's and rig him out, put him through as the county gentleman, the fine old English yoeman—I'll take care of him."

"We will all take care of him, Tom; it is our duty."

"Our duty shall be done."

"I am in earnest, Tom—in sober earnest."

"So am I."

"If your mother had a head for business, she'd marry him to Emily."

"Not while Fred Tavener is above ground."

"Confound Tavener! he's no good—a butterfly—a fellow who talks of nothing but good pictures, and does nothing but paint bad ones."

"Let the yeoman have Patty?"

"If he will, by all means; talk to your mother about it. I hope she has ordered some good clothes for the child. Patty is never sufficiently well dressed."

"Here's mother; talk to her yourself, governor, while I go and engineer Mr. Kerman."

At that moment the unexpected heir was talking to the lady whom everybody had settled upon as the heiress.

"I'm sorry that he did it, lass; I'm sorry."

"I'm glad," said Jane.

"There's one thing I'm glad about. I towd you as I meant to go away before I knowed what was goin' to happen."

"You did, John."

"I said as I meant to see the world; I said as I felt like a slave as had just got his freedom."

"Yes, that is true, John."

"And you won't think now as money is takin' me away; you won't think meanly of me as you might ha' done if you hadn't known aforehand that I was goin' when I only expected to go empty-handed?"

"I have never thought meanly of you, and I'm not going to begin now."

"Give me thy hand on that, lass."

Jane held out her hand. The young man pressed it heartily.

"I'm not quite mysen yet," he said, "but nowt that could ha' happened would have altered what I'd made up my mind to do—to see the world, to get out beyond this country as I ha' suffered in and labored in; to see London, and to be summat more than a farm-laborer."

"You have always been more than that."

"You've thought so, perhaps, but nobody else has."

"It was not enough for me to think so. No, lad, thou'rt right, I make no doubt; go thy own ways—Uncle Martin is best judge. I hope thou'lt like the world, and be happy in thy freedom."

A quick and peremptory knock at the door interrupted the conversation.

"Mr. Tom Sleaford is waiting to speak to you, sir."

"I'm coming, tell him. Good-by for the present, Jane. I'm going to London in the morning."

"Good-by, Jack, good-by!"

The girl pressed her hand upon her breast as the door closed and left her alone. It was well for her that tears came to her relief. While she sat rocking herself to and fro, and sobbing as if her heart were breaking, Mr. John Kerman was listening to Tom Sleaford's plans for showing him London.

"My dear sir," said uncle Martin's heir, "you couldn't do me a greater favor. I meant to go to London on my own hook; but to go with you—a gentleman as knows all about it—why, it's the first time that I've thought what money can do, and how useful it is; because you wouldn't have asked Jack Kerman, farm-laborer, to go wi' you."

"I would, indeed. I like you!" said Tom. "There's no humbug about me."

"Well, never mind; I'm right glad to be one of your company to London, and if I'm rough, you mun look ower it; I'm nowt but a slave that's just gotten his liberty."

BOOK II

CHAPTER II.

MR. JOHN KERMAN COMMENCES HIS LONDON EDUCATION.

WHAT a wonderful world it was, this London of which Jack Kerman had heard so much!

The streets were literally paved with gold. They were ablaze with shops full of wonders of wealth. How splendid it is to be rich! Aladdin did not enjoy his newly-discovered power more than Squire Kerman did. The Sleafords called him Squire—the Lincolnshire Squire.

How lucky to have such friends as the Sleafords! What

a genial, hearty good fellow Jeremiah Sleaford was, with his breezy manner and his business-like habits! And Emily, she appeared to the Squire to be the perfection of a lady. Patty was a gentle, doll-like girl, who seemed to him born to be taken care of and petted. Mrs. Sleaford was a dear old lady. As for Tim Maloney, he was a jewel; and nothing had delighted the young Squire more than Sleaford's ready kindness in transferring Tim's services to him. But the whole conduct of the Sleafords was goodness itself. He would never forget it; and no sacrifice was sufficient to demonstrate his gratitude.

They had insisted that he should make his home at Fitzroy Square. He had his own rooms, apart from the family, so that he was perfectly free to come and go as he pleased. Old Sleaford would have persisted in his remaining his guest for good, without a thought of payment, but Kerman was not a sensitive man, and he had no compunction about offering to pay for his board and lodging. Mr. Sleaford had therefore consented, under great pressure, that his wife should receive a quarterly cheque to cover the cost of Mr. Kerman's entertainment. There never was a more united family. The occasion of the Martin legacy, and the fortunate launching of the Cemetery Company, had made the Fitzroy mansion happy. The domestic wheels ran along gayly. Smith Brothers were ostentatiously paid the moment they sent in their bill. Emily rarely lost her temper now. Patty was no longer cynical. Mrs. Sleaford gave "At Homes." They drove and rode in the Park. Tom had a lucrative position in an Asphalte Paving Company in the city. He had chambers in Regent Street, so that Kerman could enjoy the exclusive services of Tim Maloney. This was an arrangement effected by Tom before he left Manor Farm. He had long desired a separate establishment, and it was agreed between father and son that Tom, at large on his own account, would be likely to impress the squire more favorably than Tom at home living on his family.

All this was very pleasant. Despite his dialect and his rough ways, the Squire found himself the centre of a con-spiracy to please him. He did not dream that this was part of a broader conspiracy to capture him body and soul.

"He's fair game," Mr. Sleaford had said to his son. "We must get him into our companies, and make the most

of him. It's all in his own interest. He had much better get twenty per cent for his money than five."

"You're right, governor," Tom had replied; "he's the biggest fish we have hooked for some time."

"Don't speak of him in that cold-blooded way, Tom. Regard him as a brother. You have a right to consider him in that light; but for him you would have been old Martin's heir."

"Make him useful," Jeremiah had said to Mrs. Sleaford. "Tom will take him to his tailor's and have him properly dressed. He will look a county gentleman to perfection. Take him about, or let him take you about; show him to our friends, and exhibit him to the tradespeople—in short, make him useful."

"I will, Jeremiah dear, I will," said the faded wife of his bosom, dim dreams of splendor flitting through her mild constitution.

"And marry him to Emily or Patty, that is your programme. If Emily can be got to throw over that painter fellow, let Emily have him; if not, he must marry Patty."

"Yes, certainly love," said Mrs. Sleaford.

Mr. Kerman could not have fallen into better hands for varnishing. Emily, without seeming to do it, began promptly to cure him of his dialect. Patty instructed him in ices and gloves. Mrs. Sleaford went shopping with him. Old Sleaford showed him the city, its banks, its financial chambers, its thousand and one ways of making money. Tom introduced him to the best cigar store, the pleasantest bar, the finest restaurant, the fastest night-house, and the most accommodating banker. The clothes, sticks, whips, hats, rings, pins, and other trifles that poured into Fitzroy Square soon rendered it necessary that an additional room should be added to the young Squire's apartments. In less than a month he was one of the best-dressed men in London. Mr. Snip had shown a fine taste in the decoration of the county gentleman. The make-up was perfect. A theatrical costumier could not have turned John Kerman out more characteristically. A son of the soil, Snip had dressed him up to the part of a country gentleman, and he looked like a young lord who was too fond of horses and hunting, and the other pastimes of a lord of broad acres. Kerman was handsome. He had a ruddy fair complexion, bright gray eyes, brown curly hair, a broad manly chest, and there was a masculine swing in his gait. His favorite suit was

black and white checked trousers, small in pattern, and rather tight about the leg; a black shooting-coat; a white-spotted blue necktie, and a tall hat. It was surprising how quickly he fell into the habit of his new clothes and his new condition. There was nobody to laugh at him. London did not know of his humble origin. In the Marsh, they would have laughed at the grub with butterfly's wings. They would have roughly criticised his hat, his coat, and his clean linen. The Sleafords ignored the past altogether. They never seemed to remember that Jack had been any other than a fine gentleman.

As for London, it was delighted with the newcomer. He was rich. What did it matter that he pronounced his vowels full and round. London liked it. London was charmed with the north-country dialect. A liberal order given in the Lincolnshire vernacular had a special grace of its own. How kind everybody was! No heir just come into his heritage had ever enjoyed possession more than Mr. John Kerman. No stories he had heard of London came up to the reality. Milk and honey!—it was a land flowing with champagne, musical with fun and frolic. It was a world of delight, a city of theatres, clubs, hotels, music-halls, smoking saloons, and beautiful women. If he had only obtained his first experience of it as Jack Kerman, the ambitious farm-laborer, bent on seeing the world and winning his own independence in it, that would have opened his eyes, and enabled him when he had earned the right to have luxurious tastes, to discover a real basis of pleasure. As it was, he was a fish who never suspected a hook or an artificial bait; a bird innocent of springs and lime; a man with his heart on his sleeve, and his purse unlocked and wide open.

No wonder the cruel city was delighted with Mr. John Kerman. It set traps for him at all points. It smiled and cheated him. It conspired against him in every way. It traded on his generosity; it coined his tenderest feelings; it turned his vanity to account; it made money out of his pride; it flattered him and robbed him; it captured his senses, and plundered him even while he slept. It smiled on him with the wiles of a harlot, and it fleeced him as heartlessly. But it was all brightness and sunshine and gayety to the young Squire, just come into his title, his money, and his new clothes. He never suspected the cruel, stony-hearted jade, London, when she caressed him and vowed he had won her heart, and that she loved him.

"Will you come to the Footlights Club to-night?" said Tom, after a little dinner at the Soho *cafe*, which had suddenly become famous for its special French *cuisine*.

"Yes, anywhere you like," said the Squire, "only I hope it's English; I doan't care much for these French kickshaws and things."

"Oh, its English enough, the Footlights; a dramatic and literary club. I gave a fellow a fiver to write me a farce and put my name on it just to admit me. You have to do something of that sort, you know; queer dogs! I got in through a man who writes leaders on a financial paper; he gave us a lift in cemeteries and asphaltes."

"Ah, I see. You know a sight of rum spots and folks," said the Squire.

"Yes, I've seen a thing or two, and so shall you, Jack, my boy, before I've done with you."

Twelve o'clock was the time when the Footlights began to be lively.

It was situated down one of those long Strand passages which, in the old days, looked upon the river. They had almost to grope their way along the narrow descent, amidst miscellaneous odors that would not have disgraced Cologne. Presently they entered another passage, climbed up an ill-lighted staircase and found themselves in the murky quarters of the Footlights. The room was neither spacious nor imposing. It was full of people and full of smoke.

"All celebrated in their way," said Tom. "Not exactly shining lights in their several professions, but distinguished once, and likely to be to the fore again at some future day."

The Squire took a seat beside the president, a pale, intellectual looking young man, who was supposed to be the most humorous of the clever writers on the *Cricket*, a satirical journal which kept dramatic art in its proper groove, and influenced the destinies of political parties at St. Stephen's.

"The melancholy looking gentleman in paper collar is one of the comic artists of the *Cricket*," whispered Tom; "and that noisy fellow who is talking while he eats, is the critic of the *Pandemonium*, a jolly fellow, a member of bigger clubs than this, but he likes the Footlights, it's so genial and homely."

Some of the Footlighters were eating tripe and onions; others were devouring chops; some were smoking pipes,

some cigars. Beer and spirits were the popular drinks. Everybody was talking to everybody else. Presently Mr. Brayford appeared upon the scene.

"Wayho! Hurrah!" shouted the entire club. "Wayho for Brayford! The Chaunt!"

"Waho," said Tom, "is the watchword of the club. You know, Brayford. The Chaunt is the club song and chorus."

While Tom was speaking, the club, as if in one voice, sang the refrain of "Old Brown's Daughter," in which, as one man, the club declared that old Brown's daughter was a proper sort of girl. They wished they'd been a lord mayor, a marquis, or an earl, then blow them if they wouldn't have married old Brown's girl.

Mr. Brayford was then conducted by the pale, intellectual president to a piano but dimly visible through the smoke in an obscure corner of the room, whereupon he proceeded in the gentlest way to harmonize that comical chaunt. The music-hall poet who gave "Old Brown's Daughter" to the world had contrived to wed the words to a delicious melody, which Mr. Brayford modulated and variegated with a quaint, humorous instrumentation that was as novel as it was fascinating. The lament over the impossibility, etc., of securing the affections of old Brown's daughter entered various phases. Now it would be sad and wailing in a minor key, soft, plaintive, tender; then it would grow defiant in its praises of her; and anon, in loud, thundering tones, hammered out of a major key, it would declaim the club's passionate love and its final declaration of its marital intentions in the event of its attaining to a sufficient dignity of title and wealth.

When Mr. Brayford rose from the piano everybody wanted to know where he had been, and what he thought of himself for leaving the club a whole week without minstrelsy.

"He is called the aged minstrel of the club," whispered Tom, "though he isn't forty, for that matter."

"But he's the chap that came down about the tombstone?"

"Of course he is."

"What a rum go."

"He is the managing director of our Blackheath Cemetery Company,"

"You don't say so."

"And what is more, he writes comic songs and farces, and is the jolliest and best fellow out. Are you not, old boy?"

Brayford came up as Tom was speaking.

"Am I not what?" the young-old man asked, in a bland, amiable voice.

"An old scoundrel."

"Yes, of course I am."

"Then let me introduce a young scoundrel to you—Squire Kerman."

"Why, good gracious! Mr. Kerman, how do you do? Welcome to London, sir! Welcome to the great city! And I hope it'll treat you well. You've got to keep your weather eye open up here, sir. Mr. Sleaford will tell you that; he knows—none better, none better. Welcome to the Footlights!"

"Thank you, Mr. Brayford; you're very good."

"Have you introduced Mr. Kerman to the boys, sir?"

"No."

"Will you permit me?"

"By all means."

Whereupon Mr. Brayford commenced a tour of the club; and before the night was over Squire Kerman made the acquaintance of a gentleman destined to become his agent in transactions of importance in the destinies of Fitzroy Square and Manor Farm.

CHAPTER II.

THE FOOTLIGHTS AND THE HARDWICK.

The tour of the Footlights Club illustrated Mr. Brayford's varied experience. He introduced the Squire right and left with a peculiar and special frankness.

"Mr. Snallie—Mr. Kerman, a friend of Mr. Sleaford's. If Snallie wants to borrow a fiver, let him have it; you'll get off cheap."

"Brayford. Oh, fie!" exclaimed Snallie, an old gentleman, with a curl on each side of his face, and a pair of long hands in a pair of still longer gloves.

"Mr. Macjew—Mr. Kerman, a friend of Mr. Sleaford's, from Lincolnshire."

"How are you, sir? Proud to meet any friend of Sleaford's."

"If Macjew wants you to put a thousand or two into his new city paper, don't."

"Bad advice, believe me," responds Macjew, a cleanly-shaven, well-dressed gentleman. "A thousand in my new city paper would pay you in two years five hundred per annum."

"Mr. Brayford is joking, I expect, in warning me," said Kerman, anxious to be polite.

"Quite so," said Brayford. "Here is another gentleman against whom I must warn you. Mr. Slowcalm, allow me to present to you Mr. Kerman, a county gentleman who is doing London, but who isn't to be done himself, mind you."

Slowcalm smiled.

"How do you do, Mr. Kerman? Brayford will have his little joke, and it always is a little joke."

"He'll want you to put a few hundred in a travelling dramatic company," said Brayford, as they passed on. "Don't; Slowcalm is a very nice fellow, but the biggest humbug out. We have some jolly good fellows in the Footlights, and we have also some shabby ones; we have some great good men, and some little bad 'uns, Mr. Kerman, and you must mind your eye."

Brayford's earnest jesting did not restrain Snallie, Macjew, and Slowcalm, from commencing excavations for Kerman. They began to dig pitfalls for him at once. Even Sleaford's careful management did not prevent Slowcalm from talking to Kerman of the delights of theatrical life, and more particularly of the pleasure of travelling in the country with an *opera-bouffe* troupe—such good company, such delightful dinners, and all the while making lots of money. When Kerman said he had had enough of the country, Slowcalm said, Yes; just so; no doubt the country was not equal to London; the metropolis was, of course, the place; all the world came to London; an *opera-bouffe* company at a West End theatre, that was the thing; he had been in management twenty years, and had sung all the baritone music in the leading opera; and, as for money, he made £20,000 out of "Venice the Beautiful," "The Great Mogul," and "The Delights of Madagascar." Would he

come and see him at his little place? Yes, John Kerman would. He was pleased to hear Slowcalm talk. It seemed as if he were speaking fairy tales or romance, he didn't know what, and there was a dazzling confusion about it all that gave Jack a vague sensation of delight.

"Now, look here, Jack, my boy," said Tom, as they left the Footlights; "you must be careful, you know, about these fellows. It isn't that they're dishonest, they are over sanguine; they believe when they borrow your money that they are going to pay it back; they feel certain when they get you into a little spec that you are going to make money by it; there is no harm in your lending a trifle, but when you've parted with it, think no more about it. If you don't altogether rely on my advice, ask Brayford, he'll tell you; he's been through the mill, and he is as odd and Quixotic a chap as there is going."

Tom did not mind the boys having some of the crumbs that dropped between himself and the rich man; but he considered the Squire his own particular and private preserve, over which nobody was to shoot without his license and permission.

"All right, Tom. Thou'rt full of knowledge o' these things; but it does seem a pity that Mr. Slowcalm should be wasting his time. And what a voice he has got! Why, he sang that song, "The Englishman," well. I've never heard anything sung so well, and a chap like that ought to be helped."

"Well, yes, he's not a bad sort, Slowcalm; but no matter how much money he makes, he always loses it. However, I've given you the tip, Jack—be cautious, my boy. Don't go into any big thing without me. If you want to speculate I'll show you the way."

"Speculate!" said Kerman, stopping his friend under a lamp-post. "Yes I do mean to speculate, Mr. Tom Sleaford, but not in that way—no; what my mind is set on, if I must speculate, is a bit of racin'. That's the thing, lad for me. I always used to have a shillin' or two on Lincoln Handicap, St. Leger, and Derby, and I know summat about horses; I'd like to buy a horse and ride him myself at a steeple-chase—eh, lad! that's the time of day."

"But think of the risk."

"Blow the risk!" said the Squire.

"Jack, you're on."

"On what?"

"You've had one glass too many."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"That I am drunk?"

"No, not exactly that."

"If any man says I am drunk, he's a

"No," no, said Tom, taking the Squire's arm; "nothing of the kind. Come along, old boy; we'll go and put a hundred on the Leger."

"Right," said Kerman, who by this time had begun to stagger in his gait.

"I don't know much about racing, but I'm willing to learn: you shall teach me."

"Aye, that's it, I'll teach thee. Thou's gotten to make me a fine gentleman, and I'll show thee how to know a horse, when thou sees one."

"Here we are, then. We'll just inquire for Mr. Roper, and he'll put us in the right way," said Tom, pausing on the steps of the Hardwick Club, a quiet-looking establishment off the Strand, in the neighborhood of Covent Garden.

"Yes," the porter said, "Mr. Roper is in."

"Roper's a friend of the governor's, a clever young fellow—combines racing with the law. He is one of our consulting solicitors in the Asphalte Company. This is his favorite club."

"Mr. Sleaford, you're a right down chap," said the Squire, who was soon shaking hands with Mr. Roper, a handsome, well-dressed young man, with the manners of a courtier.

"Proud to know you, sir," he said, taking the Squire's hand.

Tom had whispered a few words to Roper.

"Waiter, a little supper for three, deviled kidneys and a bone," said Roper.

It was the eve of the Leger. The 'Hardwick' was crowded with men who were all talking at once. They had books in their hands, in which they continually made notes. In the centre of a large room, into which the Squire could catch a glimpse from the outer chamber, where Roper had received Tom, there were high office-desks upon which telegrams were fixed. Messages continued to arrive from time to time. They were surrounded at once by the occupants of the room. Silence for a

moment attended their inspection of the flimsy paper. Then the Babel of tongues broke out afresh.

"A busy scene, Mr. Kerman. It is our Betting Exchange, and to-night is our exciting time."

"Yes, I see," said the Squire, rubbing his eyes and making an effort to pull himself together. "Reminds me of the ring at Lincoln races."

"There is a good deal in common between the two scenes. This way, gentlemen; we will sup away from the noise of the saloon."

"But are we not trespassing on you at a time when you——"

"Not at all," said Mr. Roper, stopping him in the midst of an apologetic speech, "not at all."

It was a pleasant little supper. The style of it, and the superior manner of Mr. Roper overcame the Squire. He gradually got sober under the Hardwick treatment, and became painfully conscious of his dialect, his natural uncouthness, and his utter ignorance of the world. He listened to Roper, and tried to speak like him. He struggled with his thees and thous, and became diffident and embarrassed. He made a few remarks about horses, which Roper declared to be excellent, and full of shrewd judgment. As a favor to Mr. Kerman he undertook to put five hundred pounds on the race, out of which Tom was to have two ponies, otherwise fifty pounds, if the Squire should win.

Early in the morning, when Tom Sleaford bade his friend good night at the corner of Fitzroy Square, Mr. Kerman detained him for a short time with some perfectly sober reflections upon his position and feelings.

"I am jolly, and all that, but it's a sort of dream, and I seem out of place, just as a fellow does who's got out of the kitchen into the parlor, and doesn't know how to take a seat rightly. If I'd a walked into Mester Dymoke's fine house, as was member o' Parliament when I was old Martin's farmin' man, and had a gone in and sat down by pianner, I couldn't a felt more out of place than I've felt to-night."

"Nonsense, my dear Jack, you're out of sorts; you'll soon be all right."

"I know, I know," said the Squire. "I mean to be all right; don't think as I'm giving up; I'm going to learn all these things that makes the difference between you and

me; I'm going to set mysen right down to it; don't you make any mistake, I'm not a-goin' to have folks ashamed of me, as you was to-night. I know I was a bit drunk at first, but I could hear mysen' talking after that, and it sounded as if a cart-horse had got shoved by mistake into the same stable as thoroughbreds. Nay, lad, I know I'm not a fool; but there, wait a bit, I'll show thee whether I can't mend. I'm groomed up and put into best stall, and left to feed till my coat's smooth and shining, and I think I've gotten some good blood in me, though I don't know yet if I be mistaken or not. I'll tell you soon. Good-night, lad; day will come that you wain't be ashamed on me."

"It has come, Jack; I'm not ashamed of you."

"I know—money keeps my head up; nay, I don't mean as it does with you, but I mean to make you respect me as if I had no money. I want folks to shake hands and how-do-you-do me as if I had no brass to speak on, and they was glad to see me all the same."

"Good-night, then, unless you want to go home with the milk; it's daylight, Jack."

"Well, it don't matter, I've got key, and I needn't get up till dinner-time. However, good-night, lad, thou'rt not ashamed of Jack Kerman?"

"Ashamed! I'm proud of you."

"Good-night, Mr. Tom."

CHAPTER III.

CARRIAGES AND HORSES, AND PLENTY OF MONEY.

"DON'T sound your vowels so much," said Patty; "that is your principal mistake."

"My vowels?"

"Yes; your a's, e's, i's, o's, u's, and sometimes w's, and y's."

"Yes?"

"Don't say 'yo,' when you should say 'you.'"

"I see."

"And don't put two vowels where there should be only one; don't say 'doant' for 'don't,' and, for that matter, rather say 'do not' than 'don't.'"

"'Do not' for 'doant;' ah, it does make a difference."

"And don't say 'ah' when you mean 'yes;' and 'make' is not pronounced 'mek.'"

"Good; it's like comin' to schule bein' with you."

"'School,' not 'schule,' and 'being,' not 'bein'.'"

"Just so."

Patty, in a pinky-white silk dress, was painting a pinky-white water-color, delineating the glories of a pinky-white sunset. The squire, in a brown velvet jacket and crimson slippers, was sitting by her side and gazing into the fire. The room was called the studio. It had an outlook into the square, where the autumn leaves were blowing about in the wind.

"Do you know I had got it into my head that folk were ashamed on me," he said.

"'People,' not 'folk,' responded the artist. "Ashamed 'of me,' not 'on me.'"

She spoke as if she were reading a lesson in which she felt no interest whatever.

"Yes; well, never mind that."

"But you told me to stop you every time you made a mistake."

"Well, yes, thank you; 'people,' not 'folk,' and all that. Don't mind it just now."

"Go on, then."

"I saw one man laughin'—I mean laughing—at me, and I seemed as if I'd got into wrong box like—a mongrel wi' high-bred uns."

"Must I correct you?"

"No, not now, I just wanted to ax you, because you are so kind like, and not so proud as some, if you think folk—people I mean—are ashamed of me?"

"Nobody is ashamed of anybody, if they are handsome and have plenty of money."

"Handsome?"

"Yes, I call you handsome. Even Emmy said you looked splendid on horseback in the Row, yesterday."

Patty spoke in measured tones, without emphasis, and with a complete absence of inflexions rising or falling.

"Did she? Ah, that were tailor's doing."

"The tailor did not make your face, nor teach you how to ride."

"No; but it were a rare and beautiful horse."

"Then you don't think you are handsome?"

"I wish I could speak fine, as they say in Lincolnshire; though they'd have a great laugh if they heard me a-trying it."

"You did not answer my question."

"Oh, if I think I'm handsome?" he said, laughing, and looking up at his questioner. "I never thought about it."

"If you had been a fine gentleman, you would have paid me a compliment when I said that."

"Ah, yes, I see you are trying me; but I'm not a fine gentleman, you see, and I'm too shamefaced to pay compliments to a lady."

"You should practise—practise on me."

"What shall I say?"

"Just what you think—and a little more."

"I think you are a good-natured, nice little lady."

"Yes; but you should say something about my eyes or my expression."

"I cannot frame it in my mind yet; we'll leave that till next lesson, Miss Patty. You know Mr. Roper?"

"Yes; he's a darling."

"You like him?"

"Ever so much."

"He's got fine manners, if you like."

"Beautiful."

Miss Emily Sleaford entered the room.

"Good-evening, Mr. Kerman."

"Good-evening, Miss Sleaford."

Kerman rose to his feet.

"Don't let me disturb you," said the new-comer. "Tom tells me you have been buying some race-horses, Mr. Kerman."

"Yes, I have; I like race-horses."

"I am glad you have bought what you like."

"Yes?"

"Because you have also, I hear, been patronizing art."

"In what way?"

"What do you think Mr. Kerman has done?"

"I don't know," said Patty, still painting her pink and white sunset.

"Tom and he called at Mr. Tavener's studio, and Mr.

Kerman bought his Thames picture, and it has just come as a present to mamma."

"Oh, don't mention it. I could see on Thursday at the play that you were fond of him like, and it was Tom that put me up to buying the picture. Tom always knows how to do the right thing."

"It was very kind of you, Mr. Kerman—too kind."

"No, no; I feel honored if you are pleased."

"And you said you did not know how to compliment a lady," said Patty, as if she were reading the sentences out of a book.

"You must know, Miss Sleaford," said Kerman, "that you're sister's learnin' me how to talk your London lingo, and giving me lessons in manners, like."

"I hope she's a pleasant schoolmistress," said Emmy, smiling.

"That's just what I said: it's like comin' to school."

"You said schule before," observed Patty.

"Patty!" exclaimed Miss Sleaford, reprovingly.

"That's right, I did; I said schule. You'll have me shaking hands, and saying 'How do you do!' and speaking fine, so that they'll never know me in Lincolnshire soon," said the young man. "Money, they say's got its responsibilities, and that's one on 'em, I suppose. You've got to be fine as well as look it, though they say down in the Marsh as 'Hansom is as hansom does."

"Yes, that's a country proverb," said Emmy. "It's been out of date in London ever since I can remember."

"Still there's summat in it."

"Everything, I think," said Miss Sleaford; "but I don't know any one else who thinks so, except Mr. Tavener, perhaps."

"You must take the world as it is," chimed in Patty. "It's no good trying to be anybody unless you have carriages and horses and plenty of money."

"That's where I haven't got bearing of things yet," said Kerman. "It seems to me, as I've said before, it's no good taking a cart-horse, dressin' him in fine harness, and puttin' him into a drag and makin' out as he's used to it, and matches t'other three of the team."

"No," said Miss Sleaford, promptly, "but it may be that the cart-horse was originally intended for the Park, and was made to trudge along the road instead; it may be that the cart-horse, with a little training, will prove himself to be

quite the equa. of horses that have never had to rough it at all."

"Thank you," said the Squire, "that's me. I know exactly what you mean, and you know what I mean; I'm tryin' to find out what I were really intended for."

"For Patty," Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford thought, as he entered the room. "For Parliament, Kerman," he said: we'll have you returned for a Lincolnshire borough, native and to the manor born, and all that kind of thing; candidate to represent the soil on which he was born goes down wonderfully. Now, Patty, away with Art; early dinner to-day, because of the opera. Are you dressed, Emmy? Kerman, a treat for you to-night—Titiens in a new *role*."

"Thank yo," said the Squire, "I left the city an hour earlier than usual, on purpose."

"Mr. Roper called to ask if he might take mamma and me to the theatre," said Patty.

"Mr. Roper!" exclaimed the old man. "I don't care for you to be going about with Roper. He's a gentleman, I know, and clever at making money; and our dear friend the Squire likes him; but really, you know, Patty——"

"I like Mr. Roper," said Patty, with a pinky-white blush, laying aside her pinky-white sunset, and speaking in her calm, unimpassioned way which to Roper was so delightfully *distingue*.

"Yes, yes; I know we all like him."

"And I want to go to the theatre."

"Well, well; see what mamma says—Wilful, you see, Kerman, wilful, but a good girl, and, like all good girls, likes her own way."

"But you can't have your own way in this life," he said, when Miss Emily and Mr. Kerman had left the room, "and you can't have your way in regard to Roper. Now listen to me. Roper is a schemer; he hasn't a penny, and if he had he'd squander it; he never pays anybody."

"We used not to pay anybody."

"Will you listen, Patty?"

"Yes, father."

"You know I speak for your own good; you know I would make any sacrifice for you."

"I don't want you to do it."

"Because you don't understand your own welfare. Roper is a spendthrift, a blackleg."

"Oh, don't call names; I shall cry if you do.'

"Then listen, love, listen to me calmly. Mr. Kerman—Squire Kerman, as I prefer to have him called—is rich, wealthier than he thinks; he is a good-looking young man; he can settle five thousand a year upon you, and spend another five in carriages and horses and servants for you. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes."

"If he were to die or become bankrupt, you would have five thousand a year of your own—perhaps more, do you see?"

"Yes."

"If you married Roper, he would pawn your jewels; and if he died, you would be left to live in a garret, without sixpence."

"But you would help me?" suggested the pinky-white student of Art and Nature.

"If I could. The chances are I couldn't. You know what struggles we've had. You know how the bailiffs have been here; how your ma has been insulted by the tradespeople in her own house; how we have had to pretend we've had a beautiful dinner off a bit of cold mutton served up by Tim, as if it were a banquet?"

"Yes; but that's all over now."

"For the present."

"Only for the present?"

"Perhaps only."

"Mr. Roper's so nice, and he dresses so well."

"You wouldn't like him in a workhouse suit, I expect?"

"No."

"You wouldn't like when you had married him to be turned out of your house and home, your diamond earrings and your gold watch sold to pay his debts?"

"No, no."

"You would prefer to have a house in Mayfair, and be able to go to the Academy, and have paragraphs in the papers that you had given three thousand guineas for a picture by Landseer, and be able to receive your pa and ma in grand style, and patronize Mr. Tavener, for I suppose it's no good trying to bring Emmy to her senses."

"Yes, dear, yes, I should like that; but why don't you make Emmy marry the Squire?"

"Because you see—well, the fact is, my dear child, I don't think he cares for Emmy. I know he cares for you

—I am sure of it; and Emmy was not born to take life easy, nor were you, Patty. You have always taken trouble impatiently, and you would never do to encounter poverty; no, I cannot think of Mr. Roper for you. Your mother says she does not think you care about him; do you?"

"A little."

"Only a little?"

"He's agreeable. and he talks well, and he is very fond of me."

"Yes; but life is real, life is earnest, Patty; and you must not take husbands because they talk well and are fond of you. Mr. Kerman will talk well enough soon. You must learn to love him, to regard yourself as his helpmeet in the disposition of his property; you must consider how you can best spend his money for him, how you will have his carriages painted, where you will spend the autumn, how many parties you will give in the season, who shall be your jeweller, and all that kind of thing, don't you know. There, come along; dress for dinner now, and the opera. I told your mother I would arrange it all for you; and Emmy will go with her and Mr. Roper to the theatre; you and I and the Squire to the opera. That's a good girl, it's father's pet, it's father's hope, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Patty, submitting to a paternal kiss.

"And you'll try and give up all thoughts of Roper? Your mother said she was sure you would if I asked you."

"I'll try." said Patty.

"And you won't be unkind to the Squire?"

"No; I'll be kind to him."

"Not too kind, of course?"

"No."

"Don't let him think we wish you to marry him."

"No."

"Your mother will explain; we should like him to propose as soon as possible."

"Without asking your permission?"

"You will tell him to do that. You must consult your mother now."

"Poor Mr. Roper, he will be so unhappy!"

"Pooh, pooh, nonsense! Don't think of him; he won't mind."

"Won't he? If he does not I shall be very miserable."

"There, there, say no more about it, I know you will

do what pa and ma wish, and what is best for all parties. I know you will wait, dear. Now, promise me."

"Yes, I will try."

The clash and hum of the dinner-gong, a fine example of Chinese manufacture from the Baker Street Bazaar, broke in upon the interesting dialogue.

"Dinner! Bless me! There, be quick, dear, and we will wait for you."

Mrs. Sleaford appeared at the door in black velvet and diamonds."

"It is all settled, my love," said Mr. Sleaford. "Kiss our dear chid; she has consented to all we wish."

"Bless you, dear," exclaimed Mrs. Sleaford, in the same measured, neutral tones as those which were characteristic of Patty; "she is my own child, always ready to sacrifice herself for others."

"Just so," said Jeremiah.

And Mrs. Sleaford took Patty to her maternal arms.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HAND OF FATE.

Two years pass swiftly in London. To Squire Kerman the time had gone like the wind.

It is two years since Patty Sleaford made that promise to her father, on the last night of the Italian Opera. She had done her best to keep it, in spite of the only feeling of which her heart seemed capable, a liking for Mr. Roper.

Mr. John Kerman had benefited by her uncompromising tuition, and had never faltered in his task of fitting himself for that sphere of life into which his money had dragged him. He was known as the Squire at Epsom and at Doncaster. He was voted a good fellow at the Reform and the Rag. He had progressed rapidly in all kinds of knowledge. He was an authority at the Westminster and at Tattersalls.' Mr. Roper was his agent, and the Squire's training stables were already beginning to be talked of, though he had only bought out a well-known breeder during the previous season. Nobody laughed at him now on account of his dialect; he

never met men who were ashamed of him. He looked like a country gentleman devoted to sport, and the *role* suited his inclinations.

The Sleafords were very proud of the Squire. He continued to dine several days a week at Fitzroy Square. His friends wondered that he was contented there. They did not know how politic and clever Jeremiah could be. The Squire would not have been as happy anywhere else. It was home to him; and he had the use of Tom's rooms in Regent Street, besides a little box down in Surrey, where he occasionally spent a day or two. He would sit and roar with laughter while Patty talked about his vowels and the mistakes of his first days in London. Sometimes he would rehearse them. Indeed, he liked the northern dialect, and he would often use it for amusement or in the way of badinage. He wondered if they would know him down in the Marsh, and, if they did, what they would think of him. It did not occur to him now that they might laugh at him for "talking fine." The old simile of the cart-horse and the thorough-bred was at last used up. He had demonstrated to his own satisfaction that he had become quite equal to the best stable. He no longer needed the social help of Tom Sleaford; indeed, he had gone far ahead of Tom. He belonged to clubs where Tom could only be admitted as a visitor. Tom was glad now and then of the protection of the Squire. For although Asphaltes had prospered, and Tom was his own master, and lived in good style, he was still "only somebody in the city," while Jack Kerman was known to be a landed proprietor, and, indeed, was believed to have a sufficient territorial influence to make him a catch for the Reform.

London was still a delightful place to Kerman, though he had experienced certain and sundry exhibitions of its cruelty. Perhaps he had no right to lay his financial misfortunes at the great City's door. He had been fleeced by Macjew, Snallie & Slowcalm, of course. That was nothing; a few thousands covered their defalcations. Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson had in the most considerate way relieved him of ten thousand pounds; but the speculation looked so promising, and Robinson was so very pressing. He had a considerable sum locked up in Asphaltes and Cemeteries; but his dividends came in regularly, and that was all right. Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford had introduced him into mining, for it is pretty well known that, however

much a man may have suffered in this kind of investment, he never leaves it. Mining is like gambling; the taste for it is never wiped out. The example of men who have made large fortunes is always before the dupe who has lost. Mr. Sleaford's fatherly interest in the Squire had been the cause of some of the Lincolnshire money being invested in mines.

If Squire Kerman had a large property, his money was pretty well circulated; it was not allowed to lie idle. Mr. Sleaford took care of that. The Squire himself was not economical, either in his tastes or his investments. He had the reputation of having won largely on the turf. But Mr. Roper could have told the world a different tale. Roper was his agent—his steward; he had become his second self; and Roper, while he served his chief to the best of his ability, did not like him, and on many occasions when he should have combated some mistaken idea of the Squire's, he preferred to let him have his own way. Roper was a man of the world, and yet he had a weakness that men of the world would, regard as utterly unfitting him for the hard business relations of life. He loved Patty Sleaford. His love was not a passion: it was something between liking and admirtion. From his point of view, Patty was the *beau ideal* of a girl to be moulded into the perfection of a wife. Calm, passionless, almost languid in her movements and expression, she would develop into one of those distinguished women whose dignified repose was in Roper's eyes the one thing desirable in woman. No gush, no enthusiasm, taking the world calmly for what it is, never getting out of temper with it, and looking at life from a business standpoint—that was Roper's idea of a woman; and Patty had captivated him. He could lose her without a pang, it is true, but he would have liked her and ten thousand pounds a year vastly well. Sleaford had been frank with him in explaining his views for Patty; and that young lady had fallen in with the paternal arrangements so quietly, that Mr. Roper had long since ceased to advance his suit. Not that he loved Patty the less for permitting herself to be treated as a chattel; on the contrary, he thought there was something Spartan-like in a nature that could sacrifice its own inclinations and acknowledge the justice of paternal policy. Sometimes, however, he felt a little jealous of the Squire.

There are men who would have taken a sweeping revenge upon a rival, placed in Roper's position; but Roper was fond of speculation, and liked to win even for others as well as himself. Once or twice, if Kerman had not stood between him and Patty, he would have resisted his decisions in matters of business more earnestly; but that is all. Roper would do nothing wilfully to injure his rival, though he had a secret hope that some day he might make a big *coup* on his own account, and then challenge the Squire's pretensions to the hand of Miss Patty Sleaford.

Lately, however, racing events had not worked out at all to his satisfaction, neither had the new stables come up to the hopes of Mr. Kerman; and though the Squire was flourishing in the opinion of sporting and financial London, Manor Farm knew that all this sunshine was not without its clouds. Old Jabez Thompson had his eyes upon Kerman; not that the astute lawyer often went to London, but he had agents in town, and the Squire's closest financial secrets were somehow gathered together from time to time under Mr. Thompson's spectacles in the little Lincolnshire town. Jabez came and went regularly once a week between his office at Burgh and Manor Farm, and Jane Crosby had looked particularly grave over the lawyer's most recent piece of news.

It was immediately after this incident of the lawyer's visit that Tom Sleaford called at Manor Farm. Tom was now frequently absent from London for a day or two at a time, and it had occurred to him, after his regular Saturday to Monday holiday from business, which he observed with notable exactitude, to make a *detour* and drop in at Manor Farm. He found Miss Crosby in far more comfortable circumstances than he had expected. The farm had all its customary air of prosperity, and Miss Crosby did not talk as if the future presented any difficulties. He noticed that she blushed when he spoke of the Squire, who had become quite a London swell. It also occurred to him that, while Jack Kerman had progressed in the art of politeness and good manners, Miss Crosby had gone back. Not that she was rough or vulgar, but she seemed to speak with a broader accent than usual. She received him, without ceremony of any kind, in the kitchen, where the old sheepdog was sleeping on the hearthstone as of yore. Mrs. Kester was as plain and outspoken as ever, though she only

shook her head knowingly when he made pointed inquiries about Miss Crosby's position and prospects. She asked after 'Flibbertigibbet, that Irish manikin,' at which Goff set up a loud guffaw. Miss Crosby would not talk about Kerman, but Tom Sleaford saw that her reticence was the result of pride, rather than want of inclination.

"We knaw all about him,' Mrs. Kester said, when, Jane had taken leave of Tom, "we knaw the ungrateful beggar, an' if the missus were of my mind she'd niver have his ugly name mentioned in her hearing. But wait a bit, yo'll see; ivery dog 'as his day, and if my missus wanted a husband, there's his betters as would jump at her."

"I'm sure I admire her very much," Tom had said.

"Do you? Well, I doan't know as she cares whether you do or not, though she was civil enough to you; but man as gets her will have nowt to complain on, I can tell him, Mister Londoner, tak' my word for that.'

Tom had gone home thinking of these things; and, turning in his mind the various pictures of womanhood which had left more or less transient images in his mind, it had occurred to him that Jane Crosby was after all one of the handsomest women he had ever seen. In two years she had passed from girlhood into womanhood. She was fair, round, dimpled, free of limb, graceful in carriage, with a frank face, and a bright eye that haunted him as the train dashed on towards London.

Little did the hope and pride of the Sleafords reck of the feminine complications that Fate was just then weaving for him, the first dramatic act of which was at that very moment being inaugurated on the other side of the Atlantic. Three thousand miles away, and just stepping on board an ocean steamer, a woman was coming to change the destinies of all the prominent persons in this history. The boundless ocean rolled between them, but Fate was bringing upon the scene of this romance of real life a young American girl who had never seen England. By her side stood an elderly man, who, in the palmy days of the South, had owned five hundred slaves, and lived in luxury and ease Born in affluence, his child had now only one ambition in life, to solace and comfort her father, a broken-down man, on his way to Europe to spend the remainder of his days. Wanderers in their own land, they had elected to bury their sorrows in the land of the stranger. Friendless and alone in the country where they had once been rich and

blessed with friends, they left America voluntary exiles, without adieux.

How true it is that the future is veiled to us in mercy, if it be that we are predestined to this or to that! What strange, unlooked for, and fatal passes that old man had seen could he have traced the future of himself, but more particularly of his child, in the land of which they had read so much—the old world on the other side of the Atlantic! It seems to pass belief that the lives of the Sleafords, the history of Manor Farm, the careers of Jane Crosby and John Kerman, even the fate of so insignificant a person as Brayford, were to be influenced for ever by that solitary, picturesque couple standing on the deck of yonder ocean steamer, unheeded, unknown, exiles, strangers, whose existence had not yet been suggested to a soul of them on this side of the ocean in the wildest dreams.

It is none the less true that the warp of this commonplace history, the woof of the lives whose destinies are growing under our eyes, needs, for its completion, the weft of romance's silken threads which are coming with those unknown wanderers from the distant shores of Manhattan. On the next railway journey which Tom Sleaford takes westward to indulge in his weekly holiday from London, he is destined, under fatal circumstances, to meet that lovely victim of a cruel war, who, while he is thinking of Jane Crosby, is nestling by her father's side under the shadow of those stars and stripes, once so loved, now hated with the fervor of rebellion. Fate is no respecter of persons. Standing darkly by the travellers, the mysterious presence stretches forth its directing arm and lays its shadowy hand upon Tom Sleaford.

CHAPTER V.

MR. KERMAN SEES A FACE IN THE GLASS.

THE truth is, Mr. Kerman had not learned the ways of the town so well as he thought he had. He had progressed apace, there was no denying that; but he credited himself with far greater knowledge that he really possessed. From

a modest diffidence he had acquired a belief in himself. They didn't take him in any longer. Oh, no; he had paid for his experience. The Footlighters had made their little game. Macjew & Company, acting upon the principles of their order, having bled him to their heart's content had reviled him and persecuted and annoyed him. He rarely went into that club now. If he did, he had not only to run the gauntlet of the upbraiding eyes of the wronged Macjews, but he had to submit to the chaff of their friends, by whom he had been warned of the pits they dug for him. Mr. Brayford had treated him with gentlemanly consideration, for, despite his eccentricity of manner and the peculiar combination of his business, Brayford was a good fellow, and a fellow-feeling had been enlisted in Kerman's interest. Brayford was a cynic in his way. His best friends suspected him of concealing some hidden satire in his pretended enthusiasm for a three-act epitaph. There was always a humorous twinkle in his merry little eyes when he talked of the combination of literature and tombstones. He didn't like his business, and yet he was not ashamed of it; but a careful observer might fairly have suspected him of chaffing the solemn occupation into which his father's will had forced him against his own.

"They have had me, bless you," said Brayford, "the men who have 'limbed' you and cursed the hand that fed them; there is this kind of scoundrels in all our clubs, more or less—more, perhaps, than less."

Brayford had a habit of stroking his chin and pausing when he considered he had made a point in conversation.

"Yes, perhaps more than less," he continued; "but you cannot say you were not cautioned."

"No, that's true; and don't mind it, my friend, let it pass; only it is hard that they should write lies about me in their rags of papers, and say I'm running through my money and mortgaging my property."

"That is their little pleasant way, Mr. Kerman: they try to smother what bit of conscience they have left by persuading it that you have done them an injury; and they avenge the wrong by saying hard things about you. My dear sir, they twit me now and then with my business, though tombstones has given the brutes many a dinner and lent them many a fiver."

"You are a funny chap," said Kerman, looking curiously at his friend.

"Am I? The Footlighters think so. They don't like me to be in trade. Why, the future generation of scribblers will be in trade; at least, those who aren't in the gutter. Literature will be the luxury of the future; it won't pay anybody. That it is a delightful occupation nobody can deny. Why, I feel more pleasure in a five-pound note out of a little play or a comic song than five hundred pounds out of a mausoleum or a monolith. And I'm beginning to experience a real joy in my three-act epitaph. Did I never explain it?"

"No, I think not."

"Three ideas in prose and rhyme——"

"Yes, I think I have heard you describe it at the Cemetery Board," said the Squire, interrupting the epitaph-enthusiast.

"My own invention. Made it out on the principle of a drama—three ideas,, or three figures, if you prefer that description. Act I, a sigh; Act II, a tear; Act III, a sob. Now, whether I write the epitaph or not, I tell my customers the same thing; let there be a sigh, a tear, a sob in it, and the thing is constructed on art principles, which are applicable to all kinds of writing, pathetic, humorous, dramatic, or otherwise. There was a time when I used to feel ashamed of my business, often addressing myself to myself as the First Gravedigger, and all that sort of thing; but when I came to inquire into the origin of our greatest men, and when I came to study the true character of genius, which dignifies what ever it touches, I gradually saw how the literary and dramatic instinct which I always possessed might be made available in the elevation and glorification of the art of the epitaph, which, until I took it up in earnest, had almost become extinct."

"Indeed!" remarked Kerman.

"Don't you believe me? Do you doubt the genuine enthusiasm of the author of the three-act epitaph?"

"No."

"You should hear me discourse upon it to the Wonner. He is a believer, I can tell you."

Mr. Brayford stepped aside as he spoke, and, opening what appeared to be the design for an Egyptian tomb, disclosed a little office, where a gray, shrivelled old man sat at a desk cutting up newspapers with a pair of shears.

"Mr. W.!" said Brayford.

A mild old face looked up.

"My friend here wishes to know if you believe in the three-act epitaph."

The gentle old man smiled benignantly, shuffled out of his seat, came up to Brayford, shook his hand warmly, and, saying "How do you do, sir?" to Kerman, returned to his work.

Brayford closed the Egyptian design upon him, and, in answer to Kerman's inquiring look, said,—

"My circularizer—a clever old man. He cuts the 'deaths' out of all the papers, and forwards to the sorrowing families the card and business terms of Brayford & Co.; but he positively declines to send the synopsis of my trinitarian invention, my three-act epitaph—the tear, the sob, and the sigh. Obliged to humor him. I call him the Wonner. He thinks I'm a genius. That's the peculiarity of his form of insanity."

Brayford rattled on in this fashion for some time. Kerman found occupation meanwhile in looking round the little parlor into which the epitaphist had conducted him. The decorations of the room were curiously suggestive. Pictures of tombstones, the Egyptian design aforesaid, architectural drawings of monuments, a water-color sketch of the Hampstead Cemetery, a white marble Cleopatra's needle on a bracket, and an illuminated epitaph in three acts adorned the walls on one side of the room. On the other were pictures of famous comedians, Mr. Snaggs as the Rum 'Un, in Brayford's farce of "A Good joke;" Miss Tottie Spinkie, in Brayford's commedietta-burlesque of "The Farthing Candle"; Smiler the comic singer in the act of singing Bradford's side-splitting song, "I'm out for a Jolly Lark," were the most notable professional pictures. The furniture had an ecclesiastical style in its peculiary carving. In one corner of the room there was an harmonium, and in another a figure of Apollo. Several heads of cherubim in sculptured medallions hung over the mantelshelf, with a framed copy of the list of the Footlights Committee, a manuscript address presented to Mr. Brayford by the ballet of the Apollo Theatre, who had been deserted by the management salaryless, and who, but for Brayford's unsolicited generosity, would have had no Christmas dinner. In the midst of all these curiosities Brayford sat in a florid dressing-gown, carpet slippers, and a Turkish smoking-cap. The window of the room looked out on the Regent's Canal, lazy barges floating by this quiet summer day. Monolith Cottage, the

residence of Mr. Brayford, was known all over Paddington as a dignified feature of "The Paddington Marble Works and Mausoleum."

It was singular that Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford should call here while the Squire and Brayford were talking. The truth is, he had been tracking Mr. Kerman in a hansom all over London. Mr. Brayford was interested equally with Kerman in the cruel news which had expedited his movements. There was a conspiracy to ruin the Cemetery Company. An adverse operation in Cemetery shares was shaking the institution to its foundation. Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson and others had suddenly flung all their promotion and other shares upon the market. The only *bona fide* investors were themselves—he, Brayford, and Kerman. They must that very day take means to protect their property. He knew what to do. He had no fear. They must buy up all the shares in the market. He did not, however, care to take this responsibility upon himself. He must have their sanction. They gave it, of course. Further than that, the Squire entrusted Mr. Sleaford with his cheque for a few thousand pounds. Mr. Brayford looked grave over the business; Kerman only laughed. Sleaford shook Brayford by the hand, and told him to sleep in peace. Jeremiah Sleaford was not the man to be beaten by a combination with Robinson at its head.

"By the way, Mr. Brayford, I don't know whether you go into society much?"

"No, not much," said the epitaphist.

"If you will honor Mrs. Sleaford and myself at Fitzroy Square, we shall be delighted; very short notice, for which I apologize; the reception has been noted for three weeks past in the *Morning Post*, and your name was down on the original list, but Mrs. Sleaford said she felt sure you did not care for the frivolities of high life, and I let the matter pass; but if you will come, I need hardly say that we shall feel honored and delighted."

Though Brayford felt that this condescension veiled an attack upon his purse, he rose, and thanked Mr. Sleaford for the compliment he had paid him, and accepted the invitation.

In the meantime, the corner house of Fitzroy Square was having a rare time. It had been literally turned inside out. The furniture had been packed away under a tarpaulin in the garden. The fireplaces had been filled with looking-

glass and pans for flowers. Bedrooms had been converted into refreshment and cloak rooms. Only one apartment had been left, in fact, and that was Mr. Kerman's room, which was not to be touched on any account.

It is one o'clock on the day before the party. The table is laid for breakfast. Tim Maloney is reading the morning newspaper and soliloquizing.

"One o'clock, be jabers, and not up yet; it's wonderful how he's just dropped into the swell ways of the town. Out night after night, nothing that he isn't in at, no dissipation too big for him this season; it can't last, that's sartin, divil a bit; he must have dropped thousands on the Derby, and Mister Roper would ruin the divil himself. Talk of the divil, here he is."

"Good morning, Tim," says Mr. Roper, with an air of aristocratic condescension.

"Sir to you!"

"Master not stirring yet?"

"No, sir; at the opera last night—champagne supper afterwards, when they suddenly discovered as it were Mr. Sleaford's birthday, and the Squire come out strong."

"It seems to me, Tim, that it's always Mr. Sleaford's birthday, and that Mr. Kerman is always coming out strong."

"No, sir, it's not always the master's birthday; sometimes it's Miss Sleaford's, and sometimes it's Mr. Tom's; and, savin' yer presence, I suppose if the Squire loikes to come out strong he can plaze his precious self."

"I'm not so sure of that Tim, unless Mr. Sleaford is his banker."

"Be jabers, an' if the governor is that same, it's only a deposit account, depend on it; and Master Sleaford's the man to honor the Squire's drafts to any amount."

"Thank you, Tim, you nearly made me laugh. I should like to laugh, Tim, but things look too serious."

"Do they now; and by St. Patrick I had begun to think so, for I can smell a writ before it is issued, bein' so used to them in the old days, before the Sleafords, an' all on us came into our fortunes. What's the matter—ye may trust me, ye know that?"

"I do. You are more in his confidence than I am, Tim. How do you think the master's off for cash this morning?"

"By my soul, I've been drameing of this same black day for the last six months. There was a man here yester-

day and the day before afther him, and I'll swear he was a process-server; and I heard Misther Sleaford last week tell the missus they must be more economical, and Miss Emily is gettin' bad-tempered again. By that same token I know there's trouble comin', and I rade the verdict in your own face."

"And how do you think he is off for money this morning?"

"After two years' friendship—bosom friendship, mind ye—with my ould governor, speculation in the City, running race-horses, losing a heap in that forring loan business, a partin' with cash to Rooshuns and Turks, and backin' an outsider for the Derby as was a bad fifth, what the devil is he likely to have in his pocket at this same blessed minnit? An' the fortun' as I see him a come into down at the funeral without a wake, the saints bless an' preserve us! Ah, Mr. Roper, a clever agent like yourself, it's not me you should ax how much the Squire's got in his purse."

While Tim is speaking, a gentle tap is heard at the door, which at the same time is cautiously opened. A cunning face peers in. It has a prominent nose, a pair of deeply-set cunning black eyes.

When the face peered in, there presently followed in a faded black satin stock, a greasy black coat collar, then a waistcoat adorned with a heavy gold chain, and finally a pair of legs encased in a greenish-plaid pair of trousers. It was the comical figure of a Jew, full of bending humbleness and suppressed audacity.

"Well, Mr. Isaacs, what do you want?" asked Roper.

"Beg pardon," said the Jew, ignoring the presence of Roper, and addressing himself to the confidential servant, "is Mr. John Kerman at home?"

"What the devil d'ye mane by walking into a gintleman's room like that, as if ye were a thafe or a sheriff's officer?"

"Beg pardon, my dear young man," said the Jew, depositing a greasy hat upon the nearest chair, and fumbling in the breast-pocket of his shabby frock-coat. "Beg pardon, I thought the master would prefer that I came in quietly, vich Mr. Roper, vill tell you I never do these things unpleasantly, s'help me Sarah!"

"What do you want?" Roper asked.

"Not much. It's only a small sum for a swell, and I wants to do it kind and polite."

"A writ?"

"That's the document."

"You can't serve it this morning."

"Vy not, Mr. Roper, vy not, my tear?'

"Better come again."

"Vat? now I am in the housh?"

"Yes, be ruled by me; don't stay this morning.

"'Pon my soul you seem to be good friends, ye two—if you've any sacrets I'll just lave the room," said Tim, intending to warn his master that something had gone wrong.

"Not at all, Tim," said Roper; "I only desire to impress upon Mr. Isaacs that he cannot see Mr. Kerman this morning."

"Why can't he?" asked the Squire, entering the room at the moment.

"Ah, a real shentleman!" exclaimed Isaacs, bowing low to the squire. "A real shentleman! A thousand pardons, Mr. Kerman; vill you just cast your eye over this leetle bit of paper?"

Mr. Kerman picked up a bundle of letters on the table, and, with a brief apology to Mr. Roper, commenced reading them. Betting lists, tradesmen's bills, prospectuses, and a very miscellaneous correspondence were quickly disposed of.

"What is there for breakfast, Tim?"

"Some birds, sir, and——"

"Get me a soda-and-brandy, and some anchovy toast."

"Yes sir,"

"How are you, Roper?"

"All right, thank you."

"I looked in to——"

"Get some money."

"You are not up to the mark this morning."

"I am not."

"Vell, I vishes you good day," interposed the Jew, who appeared to have remained unnoticed since he placed his missive from the Court of Queen's Bench into Mr. Kerman's hands.

"Get out, get out," said Roper, a mandate upon which Mr. Isaacs acted promptly, glad to retire without abuse.

"No, Roper, I am devilish bad this morning; I'm getting sick of this tightness of the chest, as you call it. Besides, have you not seen the latest betting at Tattersall's?"

"Yes, that's nothing; the horse is all right. They're

only depreciating him to get on all the heavier by and by. If you are short of money this morning, that little matter of the balance on the Goodwood can be paid in a bill, or, if you like, I can get your own discounted."

Roper produced a pocket-book, and drew out a slip of blue paper, with a stamp on it.

"I won't be bothered this morning," said Kerman.

"Won't be bothered!" exclaimed Roper. "Business, my dear sir, can't be dismissed in that way."

"Yes it can, Roper; I'm out of sorts. Look in to-morrow. Good morning."

"If you insist?"

"I do."

Roper left suddenly, and Tim came in with the breakfast. Kerman walked impatiently about the room. He drank the soda and brandy, and sat down at the table. Tim put the toast before him. The Squire ate mechanically and without relish. How he used to devour his breakfast in the old days of Lincolnshire!

"Don't wait, Tim."

Tim uttered a 'bedad' and a grunt, and left the room, whereupon the Squire lighted a cigar, and walked to the fireplace, which was adorned with a low mirror and a fender full of flowers. He looked at them, and reviewed the situation. He did not speak. If he had put his thoughts into words he would have spoken as follows,—

"I've brought my cattle to a rare market, after all! I've had politeness and shaking of hands enough at last. Poor Jane and all my dear old friends, if you only knew what I have suffered during the last three months! If you only knew what I'd give to be back in the old Lincolnshire village! Well, I suppose they've pretty nigh forgotten me now, or tried to, which is all the same. I soon managed to forget them. They must have a fine opinion of Jack Kerman, the Squire as they call me now. A grand Squire I make! The story of the silk purse and the sow's ear—the beggar on horseback—that's what old Jabez Thompson says, I reckon. To think that I've given up all these good-hearted folk for people who only care for my bit of brass. Seeing the world! Sitting up all night, and going to bed in the daylight, gas and glitter, and humbug, gambling, and worse! To be the tool of this man, the butt of another, the dupe of a third!"

He got up with a sigh, and went to the window, flung

the remains of his cigar among the flowers, thrust his hands into his pockets, and muttered the thoughts that haunted him this evening with the persistence of unwelcome memories.

"It's no good crying over spilt milk, as Uncle Martin would have said. He made a nice mistake in trusting me with his brass. His first opinion of me was about right, I expect. For that matter, I wish he'd taken his money with him, wherever he's gone; its been as bad as ill-gotten to me, so far. I wonder what the right thing would have been? To marry Jane, I suppose, and settle down on the old farm, and gone jogging to market on Saturdays, like the rest. Well, I don't know; Patty Sleaford's a nice lass, and sings and plays the piano, and it'll all come right, I reckon. But how? Thirty thousand pounds to the bad means ruin. Come right!—how?"

He poured out half a tumbler of brandy into his soda, and drank it eagerly.

"How did I say? By Rookwood? Gone down from first favorite to thirty to one. That's bad. She shall go up again! She must go up. By Jove, I'll plunge on her!"

He took up his letters. and ran his eyes over their contents.

"'Two-fifty to-day, on account,' must wait. 'Bill delivered.' Yes, all right. 'Lady Emily at home at ten. R. S. V. P.' 'Dine with me at Reform; eight sharp.' 'May the Miss Flanagans have the pleasure of Mr. Kerman's company, Queen's Gate, dancing at eleven.' Certainly! Yes you shall have that pleasure. All of you, while there's time. Who said Jack Kerman was getting tired of London? Who said he regretted the old home and the old friends? Who said he was down on his luck? Who said his last hope had shivered on Rookwood? Who said anything else had a chance for the Leger? Show me the man who says it!"

He caught sight of his face in the glass, pale, anxious, worn. It seemed for a moment as if his accuser stood before him. His bloodshot eyes were fixed upon the apparition, when he was recalled to the reality of the picture by the arrival of another visitor.

CHAPTER V.

VISITORS, EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED.

"How are you, Kerman?"

"So, so; not the thing."

"What's wrong?"

"Headache—out of sorts."

"I sympathize with you—fellow feeling; I'm wretched."

"You? Why I thought everything went well with you?"

"No, you are wrong. I have my troubles."

"What is the matter now?"

"Up late last night; rather, didn't go to bed until after breakfast."

"Is that all?"

"No; awfully hit at loo last night. The General let me in for a thousand pounds. Don't tell the governor."

"Not I. Who's the General?"

"The old fellow with the stiff cravat and the square chin, whom you met at the club."

"Oh, yes, I know. He's a good general at cards, I should say."

"Too good. You haven't five or six hundred handy? I'm stumped for the moment."

"You stumped! Why, you told me you made five thousand last week on Chatham and Dovers."

"True, and lost it on Turks."

"'Pon my soul, I have nothing handy in the way of cash.

"Why, you haven't been hit, surely?"

"Well, yes, I have."

"I contradicted it in the City and at the Club."

"Contradicted what?"

"The rumor that you have lost largely on the turf and in foreign bonds."

"I'm not exactly stumped, as you call it; but I have had some losses. I shall soon pull round, don't fear; I am on the right thing now. One can't always win, you know."

"What the deuce shall I do? The General is a regular

fire-eater; he'll go all over the place and say that I can't pay my debts."

"I can let you have five hundred to-morrow."

"Never mind, a bill will do."

Tom Sleaford took from his pocket a purse, out of which he produced a bill-stamp.

"Here you are," he said. "I'll draw on you at a month. You won't mind, old fellow, eh?"

"I hate bills; at least, I'm beginning to hate them; they always make a fuss."

"My experience; but, when one is in a hole, a bill is a capital lever."

Tom sat down, and drew out the note, affecting an earnestness of financial trouble which was put on to probe Kerman's condition and disguise his own.

"Yes, no doubt; but when one isn't in a hole, and one signs a bill for somebody else, that puts two people in a hole instead of one. That is my experience. My name is on a good many, and I——"

"You object?"

"Not at all; I was only agreeing with your sentiments. Anything to oblige you. This is how I object."

He took the bill and accepted it. Tom Sleaford lighted a cigarette.

"Thank you, Jack, you're a good fellow. It will be all right, old man; I draw my directorial and managerial fees and salary at the end of next week."

"You make a pile of money in the City?"

"Sometimes."

"One of your City friends told me the other day that you have an establishment at Brighton, and another somewhere else."

"Indeed!" said Tom, taken aback for a moment, but speedily recovering himself; "what sort of an establishment—a bank or a discount office?"

"Neither; but there, I don't want to pry into your secrets, Tom. Where are you going now?"

"To get this bit of paper transmuted into bank-notes."

"And then?"

"To the club to hand them over to the General, and hav,, another turn at the beggar."

"Where shall you dine?"

"At Simmons's. Will you come?"

"Yes."

"Good-by for the present."

As Tom Sleaford left the room, Mrs. Sleaford, in delicate half-mourning, entered it. The Sleafords never intended to go quite out of black for Uncle Martin. Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford said it would be a good thing to keep the memory of the man green. It made people remember that a rich relative had died, and left them money. Behind Mrs. Sleaford came a maid, almost as calm and demure as herself.

"Oh, good-morning, Mr. Kerman," said madam, as she glided up to the Squire and extended her small, gloved hand. "I am so glad to see you looking well after your visit to those nasty training-stables. I really began to think you were never coming back."

"You are very good, Mrs. Sleaford. I am quite well, thank you; but I have only been away three days, you know."

"Really! It seems weeks to us. I am sure Patty was continually saying, 'When is Mr. Kerman coming back? The house is like a desert without him!' and it was, I assure you, so dull, so uninteresting, so unlike the house which your presence has made happy and genial; always something going on, and something to do."

"How is Miss Patty?" asked Kerman, not unwilling to put an end to Mrs. Sleaford's compliments.

"Very well indeed, the dear girl," said Mrs. Sleaford, simpering.

"And Emily,— Miss Sleaford?"

"Oh, quite well. Emily is always well; she is not troubled with nerves and sensibilities. Patty's feelings are soon harrowed; she appears calm and motionless, but she conceals beneath her amiable and gentle exterior a passionate and impulsive nature."

Kerman began to wish Mrs Sleaford would go. The maid stood motionless by the door, taking in every word her mistress uttered.

"Where are the ladies?"

"Didn't Tom tell you?"

"He did not mention them."

"The cruel boy! he was to have told you that they are going to ride early to-day, and they may call as they come in to dress for the Row. I heard Patty say, "Tell Mr. Kerman we are gone out shopping, and ask him if he will make an appointment to meet us at the Corner by and by."

"Too bad of him to forget."

"Very much so. I am going into Bond Street. The carriage will pick me up at the Park end of Piccadilly. I dare say we shall meet. I couldn't resist the desire to come in and see you, when I heard you were not engaged. *Au revoir!*"

Mr. Kerman opened the door for the gentle mistress of Fitzroy Corner and her demure maid.

"Tim!"

"Yes, sir," responded Tim, presenting himself on the instant.

"Order Thunderbolt to be saddled for me at three."

"Yes, sir."

Tim disappeared, almost running against the demure maid as she re-entered.

"Oh, please sir," said the maid, "mistress sends her compliments and apologies, and have you change for a five-pound note?"

She held the note in her hand. Kerman felt in his pocket and produced three sovereigns.

"That is all the change I have. Will that do for the present?"

"I dare say; yes."

"And that," said Kerman, kissing her.

"For shame!" exclaimed the girl, retreating, and leaving the note upon the table.

Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford appeared on the scene inopportunely.

"I saw nothing, Squire; don't mind me."

"I don't," said Kerman.

"I've mislaid my purse somewhere. Can you lend me a fiver?"

"Haven't got one. Oh, yes, here's a five-pound note," said Kerman, taking up Mrs. Sleaford's scrip and handing it to her husband.

"Ah, thank you," said Sleaford, pocketing it. "I wanted to see you about the Kamschatka Banking Company, Limited; capital subscribed twice over. When can we meet for ten minutes?"

"Now!"

"No not now; I mean to-morrow."

"All right; any time you please."

"I will write you. Good-morning; I will fix an appointment for to-morrow."

"Very well."

"Good-by."

Mr. Sleaford was gone. Kerman rubbed his eyes. Tim entered and cleared the breakfast things away.

"Confound it!" said Kerman, "I might as well keep a broker's office or a bank; it seems as if I'd nothing else to do but to give change or lend money."

"The comparison don't hould," said Tim.

"How?"

"Bankers and brokers have their receiving days."

As Tim left the room, there was a gentle knock at the door.

"More customers," said Kerman, placing his two hands upon the table, in the attitude of a shopman. "Come in!"

The two Miss Sleafords came in accordingly.

"What can I do for you, ladies?" said Kerman, still standing in his tradesmanlike attitude.

"Take us to see the new Picture Gallery," said Emily, promptly.

"Delighted! I am sure," said Kerman, meeting them as they advanced towards him, and shaking hands. "How do you do? How are you, Miss Patty?"

"Quite well," said Patty.

"Do you want to see the new gallery?"

"Yes; Emily's Fred has two pictures there."

"Ah, then it will be an additional pleasure."

"Everybody has been calling on you, to-day," Emily remarked.

"Yes; I have had quite a gay morning."

"There isn't another room in the house with a chair in it, or a carpet on the floor," Emily replied.

"Indeed!"

"Haven't you heard noises all over the place—enough for a general dissolution? We are in the hands of Barston and Mackling, the decorators. Monday next is our great reception."

"Of course it is. I had forgotten for the moment."

"Father says it shall be the most brilliant event of the season."

"The dear fellow!" said Patty, in her unsympathetic, monotonous way.

"The Marquis of Stonyworth is coming," said Emily,

"and Lord Offington. Mr. Sleaford is going to astonish Fitzroy Square this time."

"You don't seem to care much about it?"

"I don't, Mr. Kerman; you are quite right."

"Emily's so prosaic," remarked Patty. "I adore a fine reception, and more so when there is dancing; a formal reception that is really a ball in disguise is a beautiful idea."

While they were talking, an unusual noise of female voices was heard, evidently coming from the hall. Presently there was a clattering on the stairs. Tim entered, unceremoniously, and whispered to his master.

"What's the matter?" asked Patty, while Miss Emily looked the same inquiry.

"Nothing particular," said Kerman; "don't be alarmed, some old friends of mine from Lincolnshire. *Au revoir;* I will be at your service in half an hour."

The Miss Sleafords, however, would not be peremptorily hurried away. While Kerman was trying to induce them to hasten their departure, the doorway was filled with the most unexpected of all Kerman's visitors this already busy day—Jane Crosby, in travelling attire, with a shawl on her arm; Mrs. Kester, in a bonnet of a remote fashion, and with a box which, though large, was evidently empty and easy to carry. The Lincolnshire dame deposited her box in a corner of the room and sat down upon it. The two Miss Sleafords could not restrain a titter of amusement as they left the room, bowing to Kerman as they went out. The Squire looked confused, and waited for Miss Crosby to explain.

"If you are ashamed of us, John, we will go home."

Jane had noticed the difference between her own homely dress and the morning attire of the Misses Sleaford.

"Ashamed!" said the Squire, putting out his hand, "I am glad to see you."

Miss Crosby took his hand coldly.

"And you, Mrs. Kester, how are you?"

"I'm well enough; but don't talk to me. Jane's come to do talkin', and I've come to look after her; and a nice time we've had on it. We've been an hour or two gettin' to inn, and another a-gettin' here. We've been livin' in a fly seems to me a week, and he's waitin' outside. What Jane will have to pay, when ole th' ridin' is over, I doan't know."

"We are not used to the ways of big towns," said Jane; "and there are plenty of giggling ninneys about. Those ladies were the Miss Sleafords, I presume, who were just going out as we came in."

Kerman noticed that Jane had a dialect. He had always thought she spoke like a lady until now.

"They were the Miss Sleafords, yes," he replied.

"I'm afraid we interrupted the conversation."

"No, no; our little interview was at an end."

"You had finished your talk?"

"Yes; only a morning call before going out, just to ask how I was."

"Politeness, shaking of hands, and how's weather, I suppose?"

"That's all."

"May I sit down?"

"I beg your pardon," said John, placing a chair for Miss Crosby, and wondering at her aggressive manner and her homely ways.

"Well, and how are you gettin' on, John?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Seeing the world?"

"Yes."

"And spending money?"

"The terms are synonymous."

"You are not making money, I reckon?"

Kerman was more and more struck with the fact that Jane had a decided dialect.

"Thanks to the munificence of Uncle Martin that is not necessary."

"Eh? But I suppose you've got through a good deal among fine folk, seeing the world, and all that. How's weather, and shaking hands is not all done for nothing up here, I'm thinking."

"No, my girl, no," said John, assuming all the more an air of superiority as Jane tried in her pronounced homeliness to bring him back to the time when he wiped the dust of Manor Farm off his feet, and left it to see the world and become a free man.

"Liberty, if you've lots of money even, costs a good deal when you have to keep up freedom with aristocrats who have got none of their own."

"Well, yes, Jane; but it's civilized and pleasant; and the wheels of life go easier for a little golden grease."

"Yes; and it takes a lot of that expensive stuff to be a grand man in London, I've heard say."

"It does; you have not been misinformed."

"A rich man living in London, when he hasn't been used to freedom and fine clothes, has to lend here and there?"

"Yes, he obliges his friends," said Kerman, wondering what the meaning of all this could be, and submitting quietly to Jane's satirical cross-examination. It occurred to him that it was Lincolnshire in its frankness, only sounding strange to him because he had been away from the country so long, and had become accustomed to a different sphere of life; indeed, it rather flattered him to note how much progress he had made in style and manners, as he contrasted himself with Jane, although he could not help admiring the fair, handsome, womanly face, with its flush of health, its bright eyes, its eloquent mouth, and the pose of the Hebe-like head.

"Then when the rich man gets poor, and wants money, John, the folks that have borrowed from him, pay up, and lend to him?"

"No doubt."

"They don't turn round on him when he's sold his lands for them and got through his bit of money, and say what a fool he's been, and they always knew that he'd come down."

"Is this what you have come all the way from Lincolnshire to ask me?"

Kerman felt the color mount to his cheeks. He rose angrily to his feet.

"Mrs. Kester and me," said Jane, with calm deliberation, "have come all the way from Lincolnshire, just as other folks come up, to see the sights, but we thought we'd also see how the lad we'd known so long was getting on."

"That was very kind of you, then, and the lad is glad to see you,"

This almost mockingly, for Kerman was rapidly losing his temper.

"Is he? I should rather judge that the lad is offended at the old plain Lincolnshire way of his friend's inquiries."

"No, but there are other things in life besides money, Jane."

"Yes, lad, there are lands and properties; you've been selling a good many acres, lately, John?"

"A few—a few useless acres."

"No more. Only useless acres, lad? What about the old place—old Manor Farm. Ah, it were a sore grief for us down yonder, when we found Manor Farm in the market."

"Yes, Jane, I too was sorry to have to do it, but mortgages were worrying me."

"We thought you might have given us some notice about it, or come down yourself; we didn't like notion of the old farm going into strangers' hands."

'I hadn't the courage to go down, Jane; it cut me to the heart to have to think of selling it."

The Squire sat down dejectedly; Kester moved sympathetically on her box, heaving a profound sigh, and Jane's voice and manner softened as she replied:

"You did feel sorry, then? Aye, I'm glad of that. Some folk thought you cared nothing about it, but I said I was sure you did. I said I was sure your heart must have ached to part with the old place where you had lived as a lad. Don't you remember the May Days, the Harvest Homes, the Plough Mondays, and the happy Christmas times?"

Jane's voice faltered.

"Aye, John, it almost makes me cry to think of the days that are gone—gone never to come back again."

Kerman rose, and took her hand in his, as he said, "It cannot be helped now: I wish it could. I wish I could have managed without putting Manor Farm into the market."

"You must have been very short of money even to mortgage it?"

"I was, indeed."

"Nothing but severe pressure would have made you do it."

"Nothing but that."

"And maybe you are very short at this moment?"

"Short? No, Jane, no."

"Be honest with me, John; tell me straight; I shall tell none of your friends, and Kester is as mum as if she were deaf. You're very badly off for money now, at this very minute?"

"My dear girl, yes, I am, but——"

"You hope to make all straight soon?" said Jane quickly, and confronting him on her feet as she spoke.

"I do."

"By horses!—by St. Leger?" she exclaimed quickly, her face flushing with excitement.

"Yes, since I have said so much, I will go on for auld lang syne," replied Kerman, with a sigh of relief. "I'll make a clean breast of it for old friendship's sake."

"Yes, for old friendship's sake," repeated Jane, a little sadly.

"As I stand here at this moment, Jane, I am a ruined man; but next week I shall be rich again. Lately everything has gone wrong with me. I have had to buy my experience very dearly—men have always to buy it."

"Aye, and women too."

"But I have made an excellent position; I have a large circle of friends; I go into the best society——"

"Yes, maybe," said Jane, impatiently, "but what is to set you straight next week?"

"Rookwood for the Leger."

"Rookwood! I'm afraid you haven't bought all that experience you talk of yet."

"Why, Jane? Explain yourself; unravel this problem."

"Unravel this problem!" repeated Jane, with something like a sneer, and raising her voice with the earnestness of honest anger. "Talk Lincolnshire, John Kerman; I'm sick of hearing thee talk fine. Rookwood's scratched! Now is the time for thee to talk English and common sense, if ever thou art going to make a stand for winter; thy summer weather is over, lad."

"Scratched!" gasped the hard-pressed gambler. "Rookwood stratched! Nay, then it's all up with Jack Kerman, and time for him to talk Lincolnshire and go back to the plough. I don't know but it sarves him reight, though thou needna ha' bin the croakin' raven; tha needna ha come to tell me on it and gloat over me."

Kerman turned towards the wall, and, folding his arms over his forehead, leaned upon them in an agony of remorse and disappointment.

"Me gloat over thee in misfortune!" said Jane, again lapsing into the vernacular of which Kerman had been so perfect a master before he came to London—"me that nursed thee through the fever, and sat up by thy bedside and prayed for thy recovery?"

Jane burst into tears. Kester took out her handkerchief and sobbed.

"Me, who would have laid down my life to save thine;

me, the raven? Eh, but, John, you've stabbed me to the heart many a time, many a time; it's likely you didn't know it, and I have forgiven it all, and I forgive thee again, now that I hear thee speaking like thyself. But I'm no raven."

She dried her eyes, and motioned to Kester that she should do the same.

"And it's no good all of us crying like a lot of bairns; I bring good news as well as bad; there's note of the lark as well as of raven in what I have got to say. I don't come to gloat over thee. God forbid, or to cause thee pain and trouble; not I! I come to help thee, John; to help thee, to comfort thee; to let thee know that thou art not forgotten in the old place."

"Don't torture me, lass," Kerman replied, turning to her an anxious and sorrowful face; "tell me all thou hast gotten to tell. I didn't mean to speak unkindly. It weren't my fault that Uncle Martin gied me his money to make ducks and drakes with."

"Read that," said Jane, handing him a letter.

He read it hurriedly.

It was from the owner of Rookwood, an old Lincolnshire friend of Uncle Martin.

"*Only for your own use this news,—remember that, and to save him, only for that—Rookwood will be scratched in the morning.*"

"When did you get this?"

"An hour ago," said Jane, calmly.

"An hour!" exclaimed Kerman, looking at his watch.

"In time for you to back the Duke for a place."

"You are a wonder, Jane! Talk of the prophets, thou art a——"

"Lincolnshire lass," said Jane, "brought up among horses, and farmers, and grazing lands. Does thou think we have got to come to London to learn about horse-racing?"

"Rookwood was going down in betting for some reason, it seems. But there's no time to be lost if news be true; I must send for my agent."

"Roper?"

"Yes; how didst know his name?"

"Never mind! You must not trust him. He's more fool than knave, perhaps, in this business. Scarlett's your man—the biggest agent in London, does business for Yorkshire lords and Lincolnshire folk; that's his card."

She took from her purse a square card, and handed it to Kerman, who looked at her in amazement.

'He's the friend of the gentleman," she continued, "who sent me that note, and Scarlett would do anything for him."

"And who's the gentleman?"

"Jabez Thompson!"

"The lawyer?"

"Lawyer and trainer, didn't you know that Mr. Jabez was Brook's partner, the famous breeder and owner of Scarsdale?"

"No! Then I'd better be off and look into this affair at once."

Tim knocked at the door, and entered with a telegram.

Kerman, without apology, opened it, and read aloud, *Rookwood* 50 to 1; *will you go any further?*"

He looked towards Jane, as if for advice.

"Just say, no; and give instructions to back the Duke for £20,000, and say no more till you've heard me out."

"I am in thy hands, lass."

"Can you trust this Irishman?"

Tim grinned at Kester, and touched his forelock to Jane.

"I can."

"Be jabers and I can't trust myself, so it's the koinder of you to say so. More power to you."

"Very well, write the telegram."

Kerman bustled about and wrote.

"Hadn't I better send a message to Roper?"

"Yes; keep a copy of it, and ask for a written reply, and let—what's his name?"

"Tim your ladyship, Tim," said Mr. Maloney, bowing gravely.

"Let Tim wait for it."

Kerman wrote his telegram and letter, and Tim was solemnly instructed to take a hansom and deliver them. Tim realized the importance of the situation, and went on his way.

"That's all right," said Jane; "and if it is not I've made it so myself. Now, sit down and listen to me quietly, while I tell you all about it. I knew how heavily you had put your money on this race. All Lincolnshire knew about it. Mr. Jabez Thompson talked of it to me, just as he had

talked, over and over again, about the way you were running into debt and getting rid of property."

Mrs. Kester groaned.

"Sit still, Kester, we'll soon get it over now. At last he came and told me all about scratching Rookwood. There was no time to be lost. I made up my mind to come to thee, me and Kester, ignorant as we are about London."

Mrs Kester said, "Aye, lass; aye, lass."

"I was forced to promise that you should do nothing on the information till five o'clock, when the first news of it would be known. When Mr. Thompson saw that I was in earnest, he settled what I should do. He offered to come up himself, but I thought I'd like to spare you that, and also I felt that it would give me pleasure to do the business if I could myself. I'm not a fool, as you know, John; and Mr. Thompson soon put it all down for me exactly what I was to do, and I've done it, I think, as close to the instructions as if I were fulfilling a contract. I went and hedged the money myself, backed the Duke at ten to one, and at five to four for a place, deposited thirty thousand pounds in the bank, and took the bank-manager with me to the agent, to show that I was good for the money. Jabez Thompson had already got the agent's references about his capacity to pay."

"What! exclaimed the Squire, "You good for thirty thousand pounds. What do you mean?"

"This is what I mean," replied Jane.

She went towards Kester, who arose with sudden alacrity; she dragged the box upon which she was sitting into the front of the room. It was the box which Kester had unlocked before the meeting at Manor Farm, called for the reading of the will.

"Dost thou see that box," she asked, once more speaking in the dialect of the Midlands.

"I do; the box thy Uncle Martin left thee in the will."

"Aye, lad, that was my fortune."

"They thought owd mester were an owd fool," remarked Kester.

"Be quiet Kester," said Jane, kindly.

"Yes, missus, eh dear, eh dear!" said Kester.

"Aye, Jack, that was my fortune." continued Jane, now returning to her own natural diction. "When all the company were gone, and you were free as you said, free to come

and go about the world as you liked, and when you had taken your leave——"

"I was a brute"

"No, lad, no; don't say that. When you had gone to London with the Sleafords, Lawyer Thompson came and said, "Miss Crosby, a word with you alone." "Yes," I said, "certainly," and I made Kester and old Goff go out. "Take a hammer," Lawyer Thompson said, "and knock the bottom out of that box." I took it and did so, and there we found title-deeds of properties which we never knew Uncle Martin possessed, and all made out in my name, deeds that had been drawn months and months back, properties that had been bought and conveyed in my name; and there was a big roll of bank-notes and a letter. Here's the letter."

She took it from her pocket to show him, but not to read.

"There's no need to read it now. That box was light enough, so light that everybody was right to think there was nothing in it only that little bunch of violets; but it was heavy enough in property, and, better, full of goodness and generosity. Heaven reward the dear old man whom none of us understood!"

"Ah, I doubt I was not kind to him," said the Squire, reflecting upon the old man's strange liberality to him.

"He was harsh and rough to you, lad, but he didn't mean it in his heart."

"Well, I hope he forgave me as I did him; but thou hast amazed me! I'm in a daze."

"I thought you would be."

"And thou art rich now?"

"Yes, lad. Ah! it's like music to hear thee say 'thee' and 'thou' again."

"Eh, but it takes a load off my heart to know thou art rich."

"How so, John?"

"When I came to think about it, I never felt that it were quite right of Uncle Martin to leave me all the money.'

"You'll be happier now, then, John?"

"A sight happier."

"I'm glad of that; I'm glad of that."

As she said so, Mr. Sleaford knocked at the door and entered. He looked around in affected astonishment, though he had met the girls and they had given him an idea who the unexpected visitors were.

"What! Miss Crosby, is that you?

"Yes; it's me."

Jane looked at him defiantly. Sleaford found a pair of eyeglasses somewhere in his waistcoat pocket, and levelled them at the box upon which Kester had been seated.

"The box which our deceased relative left you in that extraordinary will; I shall never forget that box."

"Yes, the same box," said Jane. "The box that had no false bottom in it, no secret drawers, nothing but a bunch of faded flowers from Daisy Copse Meadow on the hill."

"Ah, Sleaford," said Kerman, "we were all done—all sold. Lawyer Thompson is a sly dog.'

"Yes, no doubt; I always thought so."

"But you didn't seem to think so at Manor Farm."

Sleaford looked steadily at the box.

"It was full of deeds and notes and money in all kinds of shapes," said Kerman, triumphantly.

"No. Eh? What!" exclaimed Sleaford.

"Fact."

"For whom?"

"Jane—Miss Crosby."

"You don't say so?"

"I do."

"Then my niece is a rich young woman?"

"Who may your niece be?" asked Jane.

"Miss Crosby is my niece. I never denied the relationship. I delight in it—I always did," said Sleaford, extending his hand to her.

Jane did not respond, and Mrs. Kester turned her back upon the whole company.

"Nay, Miss Crosby, don't refuse the sincere congratulations of an honest man, who has no pride, no feelings but sympathy for those who need it, and who only desires to congratulate you and welcome you to London."

"Oh, bless you," said Jane, "I don't object to shake hands."

Sleaford took her hand heartily and kissed it.

"And you, Mrs. Kester, why this reticence?—won't you shake hands with me?"

"If it'll do thee any good," replied the old woman. "There's my hand; if Jane there has got no objection I can have none, though shaking of hands counts for nowt when the heart isn't in it."

"That is very unkind, Mrs. Kester."

"Then why have you left us all this time and never come near us?"

A happy thought occurred to Sleaford.

"Don't say never; my son Tom did himself the honor of calling upon Miss Crosby only the other day."

"Yes, that's true," said Jane.

"And delighted he was, I assure you, to see you looking so well and happy; he did nothing but talk of you when he came home. Fact, indeed. But then, you were always a favorite of Tom's, you know; ah, yes, now don't deny it! You handsome young women in Lincolnshire, you have a deal to answer for."

Jane looked at the Squire and smiled, but Kerman looked grave and thoughtful.

"And how long do you purpose staying in?" asked Sleaford, turning in a propitiatory manner to Mrs. Kester.

"The Lord knows! Till we have news as Leger's run, I suppose."

"That's next week," said the Squire, suddenly.

"Ay, well, that's it; though why we should stay here instead a-goin' down and seein' race run, I don't know I'm sure."

"Then you will be in town on my daughter's birthday," said Sleaford.

"Indeed!" said Jane.

"And you must do us the pleasure of dining with us on that day; and we have a reception in the evening. Kerman, you must join me in persuading Miss Crosby to come."

Mrs. Sleaford, finding the door wide open, entered the room as her husband was speaking.

"Ah this is fortunate!" he exclaimed, with an aside nod and wink at Mrs. Sleaford which that lady did not quite understand. "My dear, this is our dear niece, and I want you to join me in pressing upon her our united invitation to come to dinner, and also to the reception to celebrate Patty's birthday."

Mrs. Sleaford looked puzzled, and stared almost rudely at Jane's dress.

"Miss Crosby has been travelling. So good of her to come here. Family party. Patty will be pleased, and——"

Mrs. Kester closed the lid of the box which had caught Mr. Sleaford's eye, and sat down upon it with a bang that made Kerman laugh in spite of himself.

Mrs. Sleaford suddenly understood what was expected of her.

"Certainly, yes. Really I was so taken aback, not expecting to see visitors," she said, "that you will excuse me, my dear; and how are you? And how long it is since we have seen you?"

"Kiss her," whispered Sleaford.

Mrs. Sleaford kissed Jane with sudden fervor.

"Thank you, I'm very well," said Jane.

"I am sure we are very pleased to see you, Miss Crosby."

"Call her Jane, my dear," said Sleaford, ostentatiously; "miss sounds distant."

"Oh, it does not matter," Jane replied.

Mrs. Kester was just saying to herself, "This is as good as a play," when in walked the two Misses Sleaford.

"My loves," said Jeremiah, "embrace your dear cousin Jane;" and while he spoke, Mrs. Sleaford nudged Patty, and looked significantly at Emily.

The girls moved somewhat coldly towards Jane, who still stood firm, erect, and defiant in the middle of the room.

Patty grasped the situation at once. Something had happened which had made Jane Crosby's good opinion desirable.

"Is this our cousin Jane?" she exclaimed. "I am glad."

She flung her arms round Jane, and kissed her heartily; while Emily shook her hand, and said,—

"How do you do, Miss Crosby?"

"Jane is good enough to accept our invitation to dine with us on your birthday, Patty, *en famille*, and to come to the reception afterwards."

"Well, not exactly," said Jane; "I don't think I can."

Kerman caught Jane looking at him as if for advice.

"Do, Jane, do," he said.

"Would you like me to come?" she asked, in a softened manner.

"Yes, I should, indeed."

"I wish Tom was here," said Mr. Sleaford. "He promised to call on his way from the country."

"He seems very fond of the country," said Kerman; "but he works hard all the week, as he says, and he earns his weekly rest."

"I will come, then, Mrs. Sleaford," said Jane, "if you'll take me as I am—plain Jane Crosby."

"Handsome Jane Crosby, anybody else would say," gallantly remarked Sleaford.

"That's London, I suppose," said Jane. "Your Southern manners would be all very well, if you meant all you said, Mr. Sleaford."

"Our Southern manners are at fault to let you stand. Pray take a seat, Miss Crosby."

"No, thank, you," said Jane. "What is the time?" Kerman looked at his watch. "Your messenger ought to be back by now."

"Yes," said Kerman.

"And you forget my dear niece," said Sleaford, "that I am Lincolnshire born, if not Lincolnshire bred. We all pride ourselves upon that. By the way, I think I hear a cab at the door."

"Messenger," said Jane, looking at Kerman.

"No it's Tom, God bless him" said Sleaford, who had walked to the window. "Always to be relied on. Said he would look in on his way from Brighton."

"Is Kerman in?" they could hear Tom say on the stairs, and the next moment he was in the room.

"Hollo!" he said, looking round, "here's a party! Why, it isn't your birthday yet, Patty. What! Miss Crosby! How do you do?"

Sleaford pinched his son's arm.

"Well?" said Tom in response.

"Your cousin, your cousin," said Sleaford significantly.

Mrs. Sleaford also nodded at Tom, who at once concluded that something specially civil was expected from him.

"This is a pleasure!" he said. "When did you come to town? How well you are looking! And Mrs. Kester, I declare! Well, Kester, and how are you?"

Tom seized Kester by the hand.

"Middlin', thank ye, middlin', Mr. Captain," said Kester.

"How are you, Kerman, my boy, how are you?"

"Our dear niece has accepted Mrs. Sleaford's invitation to the reception next week," said Sleaford.

"Indeed! Ah! that's kind; and how is Lincolnshire looking?"

"Pretty well," said Jane.

"Will there be any birds?"

"Oh, yes; we expect quite a shooting-party on the first," said Jane.

"I should like to come. May I?"

Old Sleaford squeezed his son's hand on the sly. Tom was in a reckless mood. He felt he was in the right track. He talked away about town, the weather, the crops; referred to the last time when he had met Miss Crosby, and generally conducted himself to the complete satisfaction of his father, though he finished up a little less noisily than when he commenced, at the remembrance of a catastrophe which had occurred on the very next journey he had taken northwards after his visit to the Marsh.

Jane seemed pleased to see Tom, and said she was glad to hear he liked the country; all the time she noticed that Patty took opportunities to whisper to Kerman, who, every now and then turned to the girl and made *sotto voce* remarks. Jane recognized at once that he spoke softly and deferentially to the youngest Miss Sleaford, and that there was an air of proprietorship in Patty's manner towards him. Before she had time to do more than to notice this, leaving her memory to the task of storing it up for future reflection, Tim Maloney entered hastily, with a telegram in his hand.

Jane stepped forward, to the general surprise of all present, took it from him, read it excitedly to herself, and then, with a face flushed and a voice full of delight, she exclaimed, looking at Kerman,—

"Rookwood 100 to 1; the Duke 3 to 2."

"Hollo, by Jupiter, that is a change!" said Tom. "What's all this—what is it, governor?"

"I don't know," said Sleaford.

"Yes, I'll be at the party," exclaimed Jane. "Good-by for the present. Come along, Kester, bring the box."

Kester got up immediately and followed her mistress, an umbrella in one hand, the box in the other.

"Good morning everybody," continued Jane, "and three cheers for the Duke!"

"Hurrah! shouted Kerman, flinging himself into a chair and laughing aloud.

"Hurrah, too!" exclaimed Tom, "if hurrah is the correct thing, and the house is off its head, hurrah let it be.

The Sleafords looked at each other inquiringly, Emily greatly amused, Patty and her mother with an expression of annoyance, old Sleaford amazed and bewildered.

The next moment Jane Crosby was gone. The rumble of a box dragged down the stairs, the banging of a door,

the grinding of a cab's wheels on the gravel outside, a peal of laughter from Tim Maloney, in which Kerman joined, and the first act of the comedy of Jane Crosby's appearance in London was at an end.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

CONSPIRATORS IN COUNCIL.

It is bad enough for his colleagues when a financial director is a rogue; when he is a fool as well, the game of company-mongering is a cruel business. It is no interference with the exercise of the reader's own judgment to say boldly that Jeremiah Sleaford was a rogue. He had been brought to moral grief by his excessive vanity. His leading ambition in life was to be thought clever; next to this was his desire to be rich. Phrenology must have belied him, for he had a high, open forehead, about which he brushed his thin hair. Perhaps there was nothing behind this fine intellectual sign. It might have been one of Nature's freaks to put out a showy shop-window to an empty store. Clever men were taken in by it, for Mr. Sleaford had quite a reputation in the City as a clever business man, in spite of his occasional misfortunes. His scrupulous linen, his eyeglasses, the strut in his gait, his fluency of speech, his broad, open forehead, his punctuality, the neatness of his office ('a place for everything, and everything in its place'), had won him the confidence of men much cleverer than himself. The death of his rich relative, the success of some of his latest schemes, and the fact that he was known to have been free and liberal with his money for at least a couple of years, to say nothing of his intimate association with Squire Kerman, the Lincolnshire capitalist, were guarantees of his monetary stability. Therefore he was allowed to go ahead, encouraged

to go ahead, trusted, flattered introduced into this scheme, bounced into the other, made chairman of this company, consulting director of that, and generally put to the front wherever boldness and a sanguine view of the future were desirable. Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford thought he was gradually climbing to the highest point of financial power, and he had launched out at Fitzroy Square with a liberal and ostentatious hand. But for the failure of a country aquarium and a steamboat company, promoted by the Financial Society, he would have purchased an estate in Essex a year prior to the incidents we are now narrating. These companies had been floated, but without any money being subscribed by the public, and the attempt to keep them swimming had been very ruinous.

Unfortunately for Jeremiah Sleaford the company mania was just at an end when he went into it. If you had offered the public Consols in return for their subscription to some new limited liability scheme they would have hesitated; and the fairest scheme had the least chance of success. Nevertheless, the Financial Society prospered. At first, this remarkable corporation only consisted of Mr. Maclosky Jones and his two clerks; but the Hampstead Cemetery Company brought additional strength. Mr. Sleaford introduced that business to the Maclosky Jones organization, and placed on the Board, Jeremiah Sleaford, Esquire, Mr. Sleaford, junior, Mr. H. Brayford, John Kerman, Esquire, William Roper, Esquire, and several other friends and financial associates. The Syndicate became famous. The successful launching of the Cemetery Company had established its reputation; schemes and schemers poured in upon it daily. Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, an outside ally, who had vast parcels of shares allotted to him, was a great person in promoting the sale of scrip among the clergy and nobility, having a useful press influence, a lord in his family, a hunting-box at Melton, and the proverbial impudence of that much-maligned indivdual, "the Devil himself."

It was the week before the great reception at Fitzroy Square, in honor of Patty Sleaford's birthday, when Mr. Maclosky Jones called his intimate financial friends together in the handsome offices (which now filled the entire Commercial Building in Birchin Lane) to tell them they were ruined.

"It's just no gude me disguising the facts," he said, in a strong Scotch dialect, which he jerked out from a

capacious mouth; "it's nae gude being sophisticated. Let us look at the difficulty in the face."

He fixed his calm eyes upon Mr. Sleaford, who turned red and pale by turns, and examined the countenances of his three friends—Mr. Brayford, Mr. Sleaford, junior, Mr. Roper, and Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson.

"But really, Mr Maclosky Jones, I don't understand you. This is very sudden—very sudden, and, considering the vast interests at stake, I really, my friends, I cannot help thinking that our worthy secretary and managing director is exaggerating the situation. It is true that for the last twelve months the depression—I may say the stagnation of British enterprise—has been such as to excite anxiety and careful precaution, but if the companies floated by the Syndicate have not all been successful, at least this financial corporation has made profits."

"In shares," said Mr. Maclosky Jones, interrupting the oracular statement of Mr. Sleaford, "in shares, many of which, unfortunately, carry a heavy responsibility."

"And in money, sir, in money, Mr. Jones," said Sleaford, striking theable with his fist; "and I say in money!"

Brayford said, "Hear, hear!" Tom and Robinson remained silent.

"True," said the Scotchman, adjusting his satin cravat, and thrusting a thimbleful of snuff into his capacious nostrils, "and we've spent it."

"How, Mr Maclosky Jones, how!" inquired Sleaford.

Mr. Jones opened his desk and took out a very neatly-folded statement and handed it to Mr. Sleaford, at the same time that he consulted a copy himself, and read out a few items:—"On the cemetery purchase, Sleaford senior, £5,000; Fitzherbert Robinson, £1.800, Mr. Jones, £2,500."

"This is a private statement, I take it," said Sleaford, looking at it through his eyeglasses, and not appearing to listen to Mr. Jones.

"It's private among ourselves, I thought I'd just figure it out for the purpose of this meeting."

"Yes, yes," said Sleaford, "we'll consider that presently. The first question is, what are our wants and liabilities?"

"Our liabilities I am not exactly prepared with, but as to our immediate wants that's not so difficult."

Mr. Maclosky Jones took from his desk a private cash book. While he jotted from it a series of calculations, Mr. Brayford asked Mr. Sleaford what was the position of

the Cemetery Company? Mr. Sleaford shook his head and raised his hand reprovingly.

"Let us hear what our secretary and managing director of the Syndicate has to say about our immediate wants," said Sleaford, wiping his eyeglasses.

"Five thousand pounds before the Bank closes," said Jones.

"How long will that keep us straight?" asked Sleaford.

"About ten days; after that we shall——"

"Never mind after that," said Sleaford. "Excuse me, gentlemen; as the principal shareholder and director, and as the person most interested in all the financial operations of the Company, I wish to pull you through this difficulty if I can, satisfied that it is only temporary; and I am anxious to organize my own plans before submitting them for your approval."

"Quite right," said Mr Fitzherbert Robinson, speaking for the first time.

"Ten days, five thousand pounds; and we have vast interests at stake. The Omaha Mining Company alone is sufficient to retrieve our losses in Cemeteries, Steamboats, and Aquaria. The telegrams in yesterday's papers have sent up Omahas 20 per cent, and I hold 5,000 shares. Send a messenger for my broker, please."

Mr. Jones took up a speaking-tube and delivered a message, which was answered at once.

"He is in the house."

"Let him come here."

Mr. Jones once more addressed himself to the speaking-tube, and a closely-shaven, shrewd-looking gentleman entered.

"Sell one thousand Omaha silver mines," Sleaford had written. He handed the slip to the broker. "What's the price now?"

"Five premium," said the broker.

"Thank you; good-morning."

As he left the room, Mr. Sleaford drew out a cheque-book, and wrote a crossed cheque for £5,000, which was ostentatiously handed to Mr. Maclosky Jones.

"There, Mr. Jones, pay that in to the credit of said Financial Society, and credit me with the amount: call a meeting of the whole Board for to-morrow, and let them discuss the situation free from the embarrassment of immediate pressure."

Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson rose and put out his hand.

"Let me shake hands with you, Sleaford; you are a brick!"

Sleaford extended his hand with a high and mighty air.

Brayford said, "Hear, hear!" aloud; and to himself, "What a capital situation for a play!"

Even Tom Sleaford looked at the governor with an expression of genuine admiration, for the first time in his life.

"Mr. Sleaford, sir," said Maclosky Jones, "you are, indeed, the Napoleon of finance. It was my intention to tender my resignation this day, but in face of such a masterly spirit and such facility of resource I'll fight the battle through wi' ye."

"That is well and properly said, Mr. Jones. The officers who desert their ship in the hour of danger are not worthy of their country; and with the port of Omaha on our lee, as a brave salt would say, we have a harbor of refuge into which we may all fairly hope to sail triumphantly. Now, gentlemen, good-morning. I have several other Boards to meet, and I dare say you have also other business calling for your attention."

The founders and wire-pullers of the Syndicate broke up, Tom and his father walking arm-in-arm to Change Alley, where Tom had a luxurious apartment as Managing Director of the Patent Horse-roughed Asphalte Company, just then the most popular of street-paving organizations, so far as the Stock Exchange was concerned, though the system had not yet stood the test of time.

"Now, look here, Tom," said Jeremiah, his father, when the private door was carefully closed, "there is only one chance for the house of Sleaford; let me say two chances. I will not aggravate the situation. You must marry Miss Crosby; your sister will marry Squire Kerman."

"Indeed! Easier said than done. Jane Crosby is all very well, but——"

"Don't tell me you are looking elsewhere for a wife, or I may say something unpleasant. I am not ignorant of The fast life you have been leading; I am not altogether d to your Saturday-to-Monday excursions."

to ou "What do you mean? Can't a fellow who works hard M ng the week take his pleasure at the end of it? My book. olest clerks do that, at all events."

Mr. I "I tell you, Tom, you spend a great deal more money your income warrants; and I heard of you at Brighton,

the other day, driving a notoriously expensive lady along King's Road in the style of a duke."

"Oh, indeed! Well, you at least don't complain of the style," said Tom; "you have taught me to have aristocratic ideas."

"Perhaps you will say I have set you the example of living beyond your means?"

"Well, if I were on my oath, and under cross-examination, I should say so," replied Tom, thrusting his hands into his pockets defiantly.

"You are an ungrateful and wicked young man," said the father.

"Oh, no, I am not," said Tom; "don't talk bosh. You shouldn't show off and do the pathetic to me, governor. Give me credit for common sense, even if you think I'm a scoundrel."

"I think you a scoundrel! Heaven forbid!"

"It don't matter much whether you do or not, governor. I'm out of leading-strings, and I mean to enjoy life as much as I can while I'm young and capable."

"A clear conscience and a strict performance of duty are the proper way to enjoy life, Tom."

The wilful heir of the Sleafords laughed a hard satirical laugh.

"Now, look here, governor; you can tell that to Maclosky Jones & Company; it's wasted here. What do you want me to do? Let's come to business."

"Very well, Mr. Reprobate. In ten days' time I must have twenty thousand pounds. The little drama of this morning was simply a ruse arranged between Jones and myself, to impress Robinson and Brayford. Robinson has made some thousands out of us. We want a little of it back, and his energetic influence in raising a loan on Omahas and Cemeteries. Brayford can raise a couple of thousand on the mortgage of his house and works; every little helps. But, with all my resources, stratagems, enterprise, I am utterly and irretrievably ruined if I can't command twenty thousand in ten days from this. There! open confession 's good for the soul."

"Well, you are a knowing, clever old financier," said Tom; "and you wanted to talk to me like a father!"

"My plan is this. Of Kerman's money, a large sum is invested in the Financial Society, and he has liabilities in Steamboats, Aquaria, and Cemeteries; that doesn't trouble

me now, because his winnings yesterday on the Leger are something enormous, and all through that remarkably clever and wealthy young woman, Miss Crosby. Did you see what the *Post* said about her?"

"No; but I made a good thing myself on the Duke."

"Very well, then, you can contribute to the sum I require in ten days."

"Well, yes, I may be able to help you a little."

"Tom, you talk in a very hazy way about money. I hope you are not running into debt?"

"No."

"I know you speculate a good deal without consulting me."

"A little."

"I hope, Tom, that you are honest in all your financial dealings. Honesty is the best policy."

"But that is a more convenient proverb which you quoted to Mr. Jones once in my hearing, and which seemed to please him, 'Get money, Jones, honestly if you can, but get money.'"

"Tom, you have not the slightest respect for me."

"Oh, yes, I have, but I'm not a hypocrite."

"No, I don't think you are."

"Well, we'll not complicate matters by discussing the question. You want me to go in for Crosby; once you didn't want me, and at that time I should rather have liked her. She's jolly enough, but I don't want a dairymaid now." I'm above dairymaids."

"A year's life in London, and she would be a lady worthy of a duke," said Sleaford. "What a fool I was to make inquiries into her monetary resources! That old Martin was as deep and secretive as a Lincolnshire bog. Jane Crosby is worth no end of money; and she's liberal, she would part without a pang. Whether she would or not, you could raise ten thousand pounds the day she accepted you."

"And lend it to you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I shouldn't mind doing that; but to be frank with you, governor, I have my eye elsewhere—the prettiest woman in the world."

"Rich?"

"Not a penny."

"What extravagance! But you don't intend marrying her?"

"Don't ask questions, and you won't tempt me to deceive you. If Jane Crosby is as rich as you think, and she will have me with all my fanlts, and not expect too much, give a fellow a little license, let him have his Saturday to Monday, and other reasonable privileges, I don't mind. There!"

"Good boy," said Mr. Sleaford; "you can arrange your privileges after marriage. Fix her on the night of the party, make the running between now and then, and settle it before; but I give you up to the night of the reception, which will dazzle her; lay down your siege guns now, make the assault next Monday night, and the fortress is yours. Kerman is your only possible rival, and Patty has conquered him, I think. I introduced that ass, the impostor Calais, to Jane, to disgust her, and as a foil to you. Now, Tom, our fame, our comfort, our very existence, not to say your Saturdays to Monday, are in your own hands; for if I come down, Tom, I shall pull you down with me; Financial Society and all will come down with Jeremiah Sleaford."

"Not Asphaltes?" said Tom, anxiously.

"Oh, I have touched you then."

"Not Asphaltes; this company is out of the Syndicate's control; this company is making money, at all events."

"Perhaps," said the father, mysteriously—"perhaps. Good morning, Tom, we understand each other."

"Perhaps," repeated Tom, as the door closed upon the retreating form of his father, "I don't know which is the bigger scoundrel, father or son. And just as I was thinking of doing the right thing by Caroline, declaring my true name, and bringing her to London! Thinks she has been in London, poor innocent! Thought I brought her to town to marry her. Wonder what possessed me to go in for the girl so earnestly? I needn't have done so; there was no absolute necessity. Well, I can do as I please. I sometimes think she's a little mad; talks to herself continually. Migswood says she has a lover on the other side of the ocean. She's a mystery. By Jove, if things go well, I think I'll do the square thing and bring her to London as Mrs. Tom Sleaford. She would make a sensation; she's as pretty as a picture. Wonder what the deuce will be the end of it all. Tom Sleaford, you are playing a dangerous game! But there is this to be said about it, you only trust yourself, my boy, so you have no fear of a confederate splitting upon you. 'Pon my soul, if I could feel that I am not living over

a powder mine I'd settle down to be a respectable man. But, by Jupiter, if the governor comes to grief, there is no knowing what will become of Asphaltes; and I was fool enough to lend my name to those Syndicate bonds. I suppose Miss Crosby would be a big catch, and, after all, she need never know of my private paradise. I must stipulate for my little holiday. Ah, well, we shall see; it rests with fate. I shall just shut my eyes and drift; if I am drifting to the rapids and the falls, let's hope they are a long way off; perhaps the pleasant stream will flow on for good. It seems too jolly to last."

As the great tide of human life rolled out of the city that day, spreading away in every direction, Tom Sleaford was one of the units of the mighty crowd. He did not halt among the tidal waves of the east or the west; he went on and on far beyond London, for it was Friday night, and latterly he had made it a rule to go out of town on Friday and return on Monday. Nobody knew where he went. Latterly he only said generally that he was going out of town, except when he said he had rooms at Hastings, or that he liked the trip to Brighton, or what a jolly place Ryde was for a quiet Sunday, or how fresh and breezy it was on the Northeast Coast—the truth being that Tom, when he left London, went in a direction quite the opposite to any of these. He would have a cab called, it is true, and tell the porter at the office door to drive to London Bridge or to Victoria; but finally the Great Western Station would be his point of departure, except when he selected to reach his destination by a roundabout route from King's Cross. He had a little estate on the Avon, the mystery of which fate will unravel and expose in due course.

CHAPTER II.

KESTER'S WAXWORKS.

From Mrs. Kester's point of view the party at Fitzroy Square was a distinct novelty. She had seen nothing like it, though it reminded her of something exactly unlike it. Once, when she was in Lincoln, she had visited a famous

travelling exhibition of waxworks. Somehow the Sleaford reception and the Lincoln show mixed themselves up in her mind. It seemed as if the Lincoln figures had stepped down from their pedestals, and nodded, and smiled, and walked about for her edification.

Mr. Henry Brayford, who was the earliest arrival, had found Mrs. Kester in a black silk dress and a cap with black ribbons in it, sitting in a shady corner of the drawing-room, which had been converted into a paradise of foliage, flowers, and mirrors. Mr. Brayford had been ushered in by Tim Maloney, who had tipped him a wink and nodded in the direction of Mrs. Kester. Mr. Brayford, with a gay twinkle in his eye, which was made the livelier, in contrast with his sad-looking black clothes, black watch-chain, black studs, and shiny kid gloves, glided towards Mrs. Kester, striking the keynote of the waxwork idea in her wandering mind.

"How do you do, Mrs. Kester?" said Brayford, putting out his right kid glove, the fingers of which had an odd look, owing to their unnecessary length.

"Very well, I thank you, Mester Brayford; and who would have thought of seein' you here?"

"I might say the same to you," responded Brayford.

"Ah! tha might; but then it's no fault of mine as I'm here," said the old lady, shaking her cap.

"No?"

"Miss Jane would mak' me come down."

"Indeed!"

"Would hev me dressed up in my best gown; as for me, I'd nivver hev left bedroom till thing was ole over; but there, we can't always expec' to hev our own way in this life."

"No, indeed," said Brayford.

"I shall be rare and glad when we get home again to the Farm, I shall; for its nowt but hurry and flurry here."

"Miss Crosby is quite the heroine of the week," said Brayford.

"The what?"

"The talk of the town."

"Ah! I towd her she mun be careful, or they'd be saying ole kinds of things about her."

"But they are not saying anything unkind about her."

"Thank 'em for nowt, Mr. Brayford."

"Excuse me a moment Mistress Kester," said Tim Maloney, in a new imposing livery; "but there's a gintleman

as is just about coming into the room who has been axing me if you are not the confidential woman of the Lincolnshire heiress. He calls himself the Count de Calais, and he's as much a count as Mr. Brayford is; and the governor, it seems, introduced him to Miss Crosby, two days ago, and, be jabers, if he hasn't the audacity to swear he'll marry the lady, and he's going to talk to you."

Mrs. Kester nodded and looked important.

"Is he an impostor, then, Tim?" said Brayford.

"Ah, well by St. Patrick, not more than many that figure in what they call society—foreign counts born in St. Giles's, chevaliers without ancestors, ginerals without regiments, honorables whose fathers were tallow-chandlers, authors whom nobody reads, and authoresses who are as mythical as the Phanix. But here comes the spalpeen himself."

"But what is he, then, Tim? I have seen him before?" asked Brayford.

"He's a singer or musician, or something in that way, and he wants a wife."

A foreign-looking gentleman, with dyed hair and whiskers, and a fussy imperial that bristled over his chin, walked into the room and surveyed it through an eyeglass. After a general look round, he sauntered up to Mrs. Kester. Brayford stood aside. The foreign gentleman bent forward from the lower button of his waistcoat as if he had a mechanical joint there.

"Mrs. Kester, I belave?" said the foreign count, in an accent almost as distinguishable as Tim's.

Mrs. Kester nodded.

"Will you permit me to say a few words to you? I came at this early hour on purpose to have the honor of speaking with you. Pardon me, sir," bowing to Brayford."

"You may say what's gettin' to say before Mester Brayford," said Kester.

But Brayford was of a retiring disposition, and he walked away to examine some fine exotics which filled up an adjacent fireplace.

"How is Miss Crosby?—well, I hope?"

"Nimble, thank you," said Hester, still seated, her mittened hands upon her knees.

"Lovely creature, lovely creature!"

"Aye."

"Likes London, I hope?"

"Can't say. Speaking for mysen I'll be glad to get hoame."

"Mrs. Kester, you are, I'm tould, her favorite woman, her confidential friend; will you aid me?"

"Aid thee! why, what's matter wi' thee?"

"I'm in love, madam, in love. I'm not one to beat about the bush; I come straight to the point."

"I should think tha would," said Kester, eyeing him curiously. "And who may the lucky wench be? not my missus?"

"Your dear swate mistress."

Kester leaned back and laughed.

"Don't laugh, my dear lady, but help me; say something in my favor; draw attention to my appearance, and I'll reward the obligation. I am a count; if Miss Crosby marries me, therefore, you'll see she'll be a count-ess."

"Surely, surely," said Kester, "and ride in her own carriage, I make no doubt."

"With four horses," said the count—"four grays. Live where she pleases—in Paris, London, Moscow, Dublin, Italy; visit the first families; dress in purple and fine linen, and wear jewellery galore."

"And pay for it all out of her own pocket, eh, your countship?" said Kester, looking straight at his patent-leather shoes.

"No, no, believe me," said the count, solemnly, "I am not mercenary. I have money and prospects; my expectations are great, I can assure you, and—"

The dialogue was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Sleaford, Mr. Sleaford, and the two Misses Sleaford, who posted themselves within the doorway (shielded by an Oriental screen) to receive their guests, who now began to arrive by ones and twos and threes, and to fill the room with trailing dresses and a buzz of conversation.

Mrs. Sleaford, in half-mourning relieved with diamonds, posed with a society air; while Jeremiah, the magnificent, with a frill in his shirt, and his thin hair brushed high up over his marble brow, strutted like a pouter pigeon.

Patty was calm and self-possessed in white silk; and Emily looked half-ashamed of the whole business, in spite of the successful display of people and flowers.

Mr. Sleaford bestowed a patronizing bow upon Brayford, who was duly impressed. Mrs. Kester kept near Brayford, but could not be induced to speak. Brayford ad-

dressed her several times, but she only retreated with him into the shadiest corner of the room and watched the nodding and smiling throng. When Mr. Kerman lounged into the room with his opera hat under his arm and in immaculate evening dress, the old woman's eyes followed him with increasing wonder. She had in her wandering mind two Kermans, Jack the Laborer and Jack the Squire, Jack the hearty Lincolnshire farmer and Jack the Squire in Broadcloth. Both of them were manly fellows, but the gentleman of the two was a waxwork to Kester, a figure that had been screwed up and set agoing; and when presently Patty Sleaford, with her fair hair and blue eyes, and her pinky cheeks, leaned languidly upon the Squire's arm, Mrs. Kester smiled at the picture, and very nearly made a remark to Mr. Brayford, who, finding Tim Maloney passing by at the moment, inquired the way to the refreshment-room, and offered his arm to Mrs. Kester, but the old lady declined to play the part of a walking waxwork, and so Brayford left her to dissipate in claret cup and coffee.

Mrs. Kester was watching for the latest addition to the waxworks, her own dear "missus," Jane Crosby, whose appearance to-night was a source of great anxiety to Mrs. Sleaford and Miss Patty. They had asked Emily to "see to her," and not let her come into the room a "dowdy." Patty was sure the poor, dear, ignorant thing would excite a titter all through the place, if somebody didn't see that she was decently dressed. Mrs. Sleaford, however, found comfort in the fact that Miss Crosby was rich, and famous too, for that matter, since the romantic story about the rescue of Kerman had been in all the papers. Kerman had not liked the paragraph, and he suspected that Roper was the author of it. Although he was glad enough to be out of his financial trouble, he felt small at the recital of the rescue, and under such influence it was not a little strange that his manner to-night was haughty, not to say defiant. Tom Sleaford had said to him, 'Why, you look as if you were wool-gathering, old man.' Asked what he meant, Tom had said, 'You seem so proud, and grand, and self-satisfied Jack.' The Lincolnshire Squire had replied, 'And, by Jove, Tom, that's how I feel somehow, and for the first time since I came to London.'

Kester had seen the two young men talking together, and she made a mental note that the Sleaford waxwork was not so bad after all, for Tom had an air of genteel dis-

sipation in his style which seemed aristocratic to poor old Kester. Nobody took any notice of her; and she had gradually come to a sort of established conclusion in her own mind that she was really in a show, and that the performance now going on was something got up for her personal edification.

Presently, when Jane Crosby came sailing into the room on the arm of old Sleaford, who had gone out expressly to bring in his niece (he had given out that she was his niece), Mrs. Kester nearly clapped her hands. To her the chief waxwork of the evening was now on view, and a fine specimen it was. Jane Crosby was a picture of health and grace. It is true there was a touch of the dairymaid in her appearance, her arms were a little redder than was *de rigueur*, and she had not deigned to use powder. But her face was almost aggressive in its beauty. It was a fair complexion, radiant with the fresh breezes of heaven. Her brown eyes flashed with the excitement of meeting fashionable society for the first time in her life; and in the expression of her handsome, honest face there was the boldness of innocence. She wore a becoming dress of white silk. It was fastened at the throat with a single diamond set as a brooch, the first and only present she had ever received from John Kerman; but she also wore a ring which had been somewhat ostentatiously given to her by Tom Sleaford. Jeremiah the Politic had intimated to the Squire that Miss Crosby had as good as accepted his son. "And I hope," he had said, "that the next sensation in Fitzroy Square will be the preliminary arrangements for a double wedding, you and Patty, Tom and Jane, after which all ambition is over for me, Kerman. I shall have reached the summit of earthly bliss." Kerman had made no reply, for he had not just then shaped his course of conduct. Mrs. Sleaford and the adorable projector and partner of her schemes had made up their minds to fix the matrimonial arrangements as their interests dictated.

Every eye was upon Jane. The Count de Calais, who had slipped a sovereign into Mrs. Kester's hand, to the indignation of that old lady, who had flung it after him as he slipped away into the throng, hovered in the train of Jane's admirers, and bowed to her with reverential admiration. But he had to postpone his wooing to some other occasion, on the quiet intimation of Tom Sleaford that if the governor did choose to have a sham count at Fitzroy Square, he

would not stand the sham count's impertinence. This was said in the refreshment room, over a split soda-and-brandy, and the count took it gracefully, and set down Tom's anger to jealousy.

There was no necessity for Tom to crush the count in Miss Crosby's interest; for the Lincolnshire heiress was captivating all hearts, not upon financial grounds only. She was a genuine triumph on her own merits. The slight absence of polish in her manners, and her evident enjoyment of the unaccustomed scene, gave a piquancy to her natural charms. Kerman was jealous of Tom; Tom was jealous of everybody. She was jealous of Kerman, and she flirted with Tom as women will flirt, for the purpose of bringing Kerman to his senses.

Patty Sleaford saw the situation, and took every opportunity to entangle Kerman in unnecessary promenades and apparently confidential talks. Mr. Roper had not been invited to the party, and an alliance with Squire Kerman had become more and more desirable during the last few days. Patty, though she had a childish look had an air of repose that made Jane feel, as she afterwards confessed, mawkish and out of place; and when Kerman conducted her to the piano, and she sang to the count's accompaniment a song full of love and devotion and feminine sentiment, Jane felt that she could not compete with her, and she ceased to wonder that the Squire was captivated. However, there was one comfort in her calculations. She was determined that all doubts should end to-night; that she would either have him at her feet confessing his love, or she would give him up for good. She would show him that she could do without him; that she was not fool enough to make herself miserable for him; that if he did not think her good enough for him there were others who could find merit enough in her to be happy when she smiled upon them. It could not be that he really cared about her, or the events of the past week, and her almost open avowal of her love for him, would have brought a declaration of his for her. Jane felt humbled when she thought of what she had done for him. Her pride prompted her to reflect on her conduct, and to feel that there was only one satisfactory conclusion to her visit to London—the announcement of her forthcoming marriage with her friend and countryman. If that did not come to pass it would be said that she had followed him to London, and had tried to buy him. In-

deed, there was no knowing what people might say. One thing she had made up her mind about, he should not triumph over her.

In the meantime John Kerman had suffered all kinds of new sensations. Seeing Jane courted and flattered, discovering for the first time in his life what a beautiful woman she was, he had come to the conclusion that his love for her had manifested itself to him when it was too late. He saw that she walked about with Tom Sleaford, and talked to him with evident pleasure. He chafed at the fact that everybody was talking about the paragraph in the papers which showed him under an obligation to Jane. It irritated him to think how he had left this kindhearted creature unnoticed for years, spending the money which had by right belonged to her; how he had deserted his old friends, and when his selfish conduct had brought him to grief, how they had saved him. It had come into his mind that he had played anything but a manly part, and he had resolved that this night should not pass without an effort to redeem the past, and find a new and worthy path for the future. An honest word of explanation, a frank disclosure of his thoughts and feelings to his only true friend, would have saved him a world of misery; but he was jealous of her, annoyed with himself, the victim of a false pride; he was tired of the hollow mockery of London, and disappointed that money could not buy content and happiness. He wished old Martin had not left him sixpence; he wished he had gone out into the world without a penny; he longed for that same freedom which had dazzled his untutored mind when Uncle Martin died; in short, he was wretched, and he could not quite tell why he was miserable.

At the back of the corner house in Fitzroy Square there were a small garden, a conservatory, and a couple of summer houses. Dimly lighted with Chinese lanterns, the space was prettily utilized. The paths were carpeted. The flowers were all in full bloom, for they had been brought in during the day from the nurseryman's. Tom Sleaford, who was viciously fond of money for the sake of the selfish pleasures it could purchase, had made up his mind to win and to marry Jane Crosby, and she had been so pleasant and agreeable to him during this eventful evening, that he was anxious to fulfil his father's programme and propose for her; not that he loved her, or any such nonsense as that, he said to himself, but because she was jolly, handsome,

and rich, and he thought he could get along with her. For the time being, he wiped out all the other considerations which would have held back an ordinary honest man. He had done a complete tour of the rooms with her; they had listened to an Italian song and a dramatic recital; they had eaten an ice together; they had looked at some of the best of the hundred hired pictures by famous masters; and at last they had found themselves seated in one of the dimly-lighted arbors in the garden.

"Now I think we will go back to the drawing-room, Mr. Tom," said Jane.

"Permit me to detain you a moment," said Tom. "My dear Miss Crosby, permit me to recall to you the dear old place in Lincolnshire, where we first met."

"Yes," said Jane, encouragingly.

"If I had had the slightest encouragement at that time, I should not have to repeat solemnly now what you wouldn't let me say then."

"Mr. Sleaford," said Jane, about to say she hardly knew what, but anxious to stop what she felt was going to be a formal proposal from Tom.

"Forgive me, Miss Crosby. Jane—let me say Jane—don't put me down as one of these mercenary men who have been hanging after you to-night. Before I knew that you had a penny, when, indeed, I thought you a dependent on Squire Martin, I loved you for your beauty and your goodness."

"That will do, Mr. Tom," said Jane; "that will do. I know you want to marry me—you, a fine gentleman; me, an ignorant country girl, with a dialect. Nay, that's what I am, when all's said and done. Suppose I consented, and I have been thinking about it."

"My dear girl!" exclaimed Tom.

"Wait a bit. I have been thinking about nothing else for the last hour and a half, and I've been saying to myself, 'Suppose Tom Sleaford asks me to marry him.'"

"Well?" said Tom, just a little taken aback at her frankness.

"Suppose I did," continued Jane, "where should we live—in London or in Lincolnshire?"

"Wherever you desired," said Tom.

"I'm a practical woman," said Jane, "and I've learned a good deal during the last fortnight of my visit to London. I feel flattered by your kindness and attention, but I don't

think I see my way to say 'Yes' to you. Once to-night I think I should have said it; if you had asked me an hour ago, I think I should, but——"

"Don't say 'But,' dear; say 'Yes.'"

"But look here," continued Miss Crosby, disregarding the interruption, "suppose we married, and I came to live in London with you, I shouldn't be fit for this kind of life. Not that I couldn't smirk and smile, and paint my face and my manners too, if I tried; but I shouldn't be happy going to bed when one should be getting up; simpering at parties like this, and pretending you are enjoying yourself; looking at pictures, and listening to foreign songs that one doesn't understand. But that's not in my way, and I don't think I'd ever get used to it. I should be tired in a month, and you'd be ashamed of me in a week."

"Then we will live in the country at the Marsh. I'll go in for farming, and hunting and shooting."

"Nay, you'd be just as miserable in the Marsh, as my husband, as I should be as your wife in London. Lads would laugh at your soft manners and cockney ways. You would complain that we get up in the middle of the night: and how would you stand Sundays? Eh, dear, twice to church; dinner at one in the day; a gossip about crops and weather; to bed at ten; and there isn't a railway within ten miles; and the only decent theatre is at Lincoln, open at race times and the fair."

Tom set against this the counter reflection that London was only four hours away from the nearest station; and he was not without a special experience of to him a pleasant combination of London and country life.

"And if we go to the theatre once in a year," she continued, "we have to make a journey on purpose, and stay all night in Lincoln, and, maybe, not like the play when we've seen it. Nay, my lad, you would die of the dumps in Lincolnshire, and it would make me miserable to see thee unhappy, especially when I love the dear old country, every inch of it, and all the plain, straight, honest folk in it, their homely ways, their country manners. I'm hungering to get back to it now."

"Don't say that."

"Yes, I do say it, and further," she continued, rising, and putting out her hand in a kindly sympathizing way, there's my hand as a friend, Tom Sleaford, but I shall never marry."

John Kerman and Patty passed the house just as Jane was laying her hand in Tom's. The Squire watched the action, and Jane was saying, "Take me into the house," as she brushed by him, leaning on Tom's arm.

"It is all over with Tom," said Patty, as Jane and her brother walked slowly into the conservatory and disappeared.

"Yes," said Kerman.

"I wonder when they'll be married?"

"Do you think they will be married?"

"I should think so. Don't you think so?"

"Yes; of course they will be married," said Kerman: and as he spoke he put the last concluding touch to his programme of action,

---

CHAPTER III.

THE SQUIRE COMPLETES HIS LONDON EDUCATION AND DISAPPEARS.

"ARE you not glad John?" said Miss Patty. "I'm sure my brother Tom will make her a good husband."

"He ought to. She'll be the best wife in the world."

They were seated in the arbor which Tom and Jane had just left.

"She is very kind-hearted," said Patty.

"Kindhearted!" responded Kerman. "That is weak language applied to her, Miss Sleaford. She is the best woman in the world. You have no idea what she is. We were brought up together, she and I."

"Yes, so I understand, in Lincolnshire."

"Yes lad and lass together, girl and boy; we walked together, went to the same church, gathered flowers together on May day, were like brother and sister—more than brother and sister, only I didn't know it. I never properly understood her. I was a fool, an ignorant dolt, too dull to see her good qualities."

"No, no, my dear Mr. Kerman, you paint them like a poet; you do yourself an injustice."

"Patty—Miss Sleaford, you don't know how selfish I

am. When I got that money which she should have had, I came away and left the old place, like a brute, came up here and thought myself a great swell, got into difficulties, mortgaged the old property, never consulted my old friends, never went to see them, didn't even write to Jane; unknown to me, she buys up the mortages, watches over my affairs, with the assistance of dear old Jabez Thompson, and at the last moment, when I'm on the brink of ruin, she comes up to London, and saves me—rescues me just as much as a drowning man is saved at his last gasp; and I was half ashamed of her even then, because she wasn't fashionably dressed, and didn't talk fine, as they say in Lincolnshire. There's a woman for you, Patty! And here's a man—a coward, a sneak, a fool."

Kerman stood before Miss Sleaford pale and agitated.

"No, no, Mr. Kerman," she said, in her calm, measured way, "do not say that; if any one else spoke of you in such terms, I would never know them again, wherever I might meet them."

"Do you really feel as much interest in me as that?" he asked suddenly.

"Can you doubt it?"

"After what I have just told you?"

"Yes, whatever you might say."

They were interrupted at this point by Mrs. and Mr. Sleaford.

"Let us go into the conservatory," said Patty.

"Are they coming to make love in the arbor?" asked Kerman, cynically.

The old birds pretended not to see the young ones as they fluttered away in the direction of the house.

"There they go," said Jeremiah; "marriage used to be the reliance of states and nations. I feel like a potentate arranging alliances. These projects are just as important, my love, to us, as great political marriages to intriguing powers."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Sleaford.

"Tom has succeeded, that's pretty certain; she has hardly left his side all the night; my only fear was Tom, for I can't help thinking that Miss Crosby is fond of Kerman: it was a fortunate thing that we booked him early. Patty's a clever girl—a dear, good, clever girl."

"I have known trouble enough, Jeremiah; if there is a fear of any more it would be best not to keep it from me.'

"Trouble, my dear; a man with large investments, and associated with the financial energy of his country, must always be full of anxieties; but I have no reason, my love, to anticipate anything but prosperity, happiness, and wealth; this night is a triumph for both of us; we have only one drawback, Emily's idiotic attachment to Tavener."

"But we can afford to look over that," said Mrs. Sleaford, apologetically. "He's a handsome young man, and some day may be successful; I'm sure I hope so."

"Handsome, yes; but art, unless you are at the top of the ladder, and can plant it against the casement of fashion and climb into the society of princes, is no good, Mrs. Sleaford, no good. Emily ought to know better."

"It's no use saying so."

"I know it, but I can't help regretting it. I have only seen Tavener once to-night."

"He has gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed Sleaford.

"He knows you do not care for him, and he only responded to our invitation for Emily's sake. He came as a matter of form. Lord Merrythought shook hands with him, and he looked very well, and walked about for a few minutes with quite an air."

"Did he, the upstart!"

"My love, you must not be severe, for Emily's sake. Listen, she is singing; what a sweet voice it is! Come, let us return; people will think it odd, and we have nothing more to learn about our darlings."

"Right, my dear, right. Tom and Patty are provided for. Em must be treated as a luxury. Let her marry for love, as she calls it; we must patronize Tavener, and make our friends to buy his pictures, that's all."

They re-entered the reception-room in time for the applause which greeted Miss Sleaford's song. The Count de Calais then performed a fantasia, which he played with all his soul and body, fairly leaping at the instrument at one moment and seeming to soothe and stroke it the next. Mrs. Kester had found a sympathetic companion in an elderly gentleman who had suffered for many years from sunstroke, which nearly cost him his life in India. They were both delighted with the Count's playing. Before the performer had finished, supper was announced, and the guests were hunting up the partners who had been alloted to them long before by Mr. and Mrs. Sleaford, during their

many promenades about the room, and by Miss Sleaford, in her quiet, unostentatious, and business-like way. Though the company was what is called in society slightly mixed, there were some excellent people at the Sleaford's on this occasion, West End people and City people, the former represented by the third-rate nobility, which finds the City a useful association, and the latter by some wealthy and well-known bankers, financiers, and brokers. Mr. Sleaford had no reason to feel ashamed of his guests, and Mrs. Sleaford had every reason to feel proud, because she could see that some of her most intimate friends were full of envy, hatred, and malice at her social success.

Jane Crosby and Tom Sleaford sat together, and their manner convinced Sleaford that the one question between them was when the marriage should take place. The two young people, it was true, quite understood each other. They talked and chatted with a familiarity never so free as now. Miss Crosby appeared to be quite happy; Tom perfectly at his ease. John Kerman thought so. He was beginning to feel the same kind of happiness—the happiness of knowing the worst—the happiness of having settled in your mind some great doubt, or fear, or plan. Jane looked happy, because she had refused Tom, and had resolved to be a martyr to her love. Tom was unconstrained, because he had done his best to carry out the paternal scheme, and had failed, not through any fault of his own; moreover, in failing, he had at all events, made a friend of a woman who might some day be useful to him. For Jane had said, "Let us be friends, Tom; we are neither of us fools, and we know that love can't be turned on to order."

Tom had also felt, after all, that he had had a narrow escape from a difficulty, beyond that simple question of whether he would live in London or in the country for the remainder of his natural life.

The Squire tried to imitate Tom in his gayety of manner, and at the moment he was really not unhappy, for he had resolved upon a great sacrifice.

"Let us slip away from the supper-room as soon as we can, Patty. I want to finish that conversation we commenced a short time since."

Patty nearly blushed. For a moment she wished the Squire were Roper; but she gulped down a glass of champagne, and, looking into a future of luxury and ease, of carriages and horses and plenty of money, said,—

"I am ready."

"My dear Miss Sleaford—my dear Patty," said the Squire, in the shade of a clump of white roses by the conservatory, "I cannot mistake the true feeling of your heart. There are those who think you cool and calculating."

"Oh, Mr. Kerman!"

"I don't think so."

"Thank you."

"I am sure you are not."

"Thank you again."

"I know you would make sacrifices to duty and to love."

Patty looked up into his eyes, which were ablaze with a new light. His face was pale.

"How hard he finds it to say the word!" thought Patty.

"For some little time I have been endeavoring to study your sweet, self-denying nature."

"Spare my blushes," said Patty, not knowing what else to say.

"I do not know," continued the Squire, "whether most to admire your self-sacrifice or your devotion. Any man could not fail to feel flattered at your condescension. You love Mr. William Roper?"

Patty uttered a little scream of surprise.

The Squire took her hand, continuing his startling speech.

"You love him for himself; you would marry me for my money."

Patty, after a fruitless struggle to resent the insult, broke down under the earnestness and truth of the charge.

"I don't blame you, my dear; I don't blame you, my pretty little London lady. You are in the fashion. This Cruel London of yours makes matches every day on your father's plan. You are only dutifully obeying him. Don't cry, my dear; don't cry."

The Squire spoke with tears in his voice, and put his arm gently round her waist.

"You shall be made happy. Don't be put out; dry your eyes. I'll do some good before I lay down the part of squire and gentleman, and take up my own rightful character. Miss Crosby and your brother are coming; they can see us. Take my arm, and listen as we walk. I must say all I have to say."

Patty laid her hand upon the Squire's strong arm, and they walked to a shadier part of the garden; for now other guests began to seek the cooler air of the night outside the house.

"I'm tired of money," continued Kerman, "tired of everything, almost of life. I only loved one woman, and I have found that out too late. God bless her! I hope she will be happy, as she deserves to be, with your brother. But I couldn't bear to see her another's. I shall go away to America, chalk out a new life, and try to forget the past. As for the money, my poor self-sacrificing little London love, you and Roper shall have enough to satisfy even your politic father."

"Oh, Mr. Kerman!" exclaimed Patty, "you don't know how mean and contemptible you make me feel."

"I didn't mean to pain you."

"I see how despicable I am; I know how unworthy I am of a good man's love. Pray give me a seat."

He led her to a garden-chair away in the furthermost corner of the garden, and stood silently by her for a few minutes while she cried.

"Don't take it to heart so. Tell me that I have spoken the truth, and then I will proceed to tell you my plans."

"Don't ask me to say "Yes" or "No." Let the confession of my shame and humiliation suffice."

"You don't contradict what I have said?"

"Oh no, Mr. Kerman, I do not, I do not."

"Then say nothing of what has transpired until you have a letter from me in the morning. When your father or mother asks you if I have proposed, say that I preferred to put it in writing."

"Yes."

"You promise?"

"I do."

"You shall not regret it my dear. I will give you a dower that shall satisfy your husband. I want to feel that I have at least done one good thing; and now, good-by!"

He took her hand. She stood up. He kissed her.

"My child," he said, "not my wife; I will be as good as a father to you."

The next moment he was gone.

* * * *

And for all practical purposes, so far as this history is concerned, that was the end of the Sleaford party. There

was much talking and promenading, more singing, some flirting, even an impromptu waltz near the grand piano. Blue lights and green lights were burned in the garden; cabs and carriages dashed in and out of Fitzroy Square; linkmen bawled to each other; a card party was started in Kerman's room; and everybody said that the social gathering had been a decided success. Everybody was wrong. It had been a failure of the direst kind in the estimation of the host and hostess; though Mrs. Sleaford found in her motherly heart a little corner in which Patty and her true lover were enshrined with happy omens. Tom confided to his parents, before the night was over, the result of his proposal to Miss Crosby; all that they could get from Patty was that Mr. Kerman would write her a letter the next day. Emily saw trouble in Patty's eyes, and went to sleep at last in her arms, after obtaining a full and complete confession of all that had occurred. The next day a solicitor waited upon Mr. Sleaford and Miss Crosby. In due legal form John Kerman had made out a deed of gift of ten thousand pounds, in the hands of trustees, to be paid on Patty Sleaford's marriage with Mr. William Roper, or any other person whom she might freely select; and a deed of gift to Jane Crosby of all he possessed besides, with a power of attorney for her to act for him in any question that might arise, assigning to her any interest he might still possess in the late Ephraim Martin's will, and requesting her to place Mr. Jabez Thompson in communication with his solicitor. The whole business had been put into careful legal shape, and there was a private note to Jane, in these words, "I restore all (but the sum I venture to give to poor little Patty) to her who has a right to it. God bless you, Jane, my dear friend; God bless you and good-by. I am going to face the world in earnest now. We shall meet again, I hope, some day. May you be very happy, my dearest and only friend."

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

MARTYRS AND VICTIMS IN PEACE AND WAR.

FROM a luxurious home in the Southern States of America, to a fugitive existence in a country desolated by war; from penury in New York to a happy home on the hillside of a smiling valley in old England: these were changes which represented strange experiences in a young girl's lifetime. Caroline Virginia Denton, whom two years ago we saw standing by her father's side on that ocean steamer leaving the harbor of New York, had gone through all this in a few short years, and we encounter her, still a girl (though exercising the duties of womanhood), at a picturesque house called "The Cottage," overlooking the peaceful valley of Essam on the Avon.

In the rare summer setting of the English meadows, "The Cottage" was a gem of architectural simplicity. Sitting on the green lawn, Caroline Denton, now Mrs. Philip Gardner, looked like some Oriental flower transplanted into an English garden. Less than the middle height, her figure was slim and dainty. She moved with an indefinable gracefulness. Her face, her hair, were Southern in type and character. Dark, with the glowing radiance of health, there was a world of softness and beauty in her eyes. They were black as night, and tender as opening buds in spring. Her hair had a tinge of raven blackness, and there was a wavy luxuriance in its folds. When she looked at you, the dreamy softness, the pathetic happiness of the face touched you. If you tried to read it you would say there was a void in the woman's heart: a sense of a mission unfulfilled; a mind that had its sorrowful secret, nursed in nursing hours of loneliness; a longing for something undefined.

When she smiled it was the sun breaking through a rain cloud; when she laughed it was the sun at noon, bright, clear, jocund. But she rarely laughed, except at the play of an infant, her first-born, which would wile away her time by lamb-like gambols on the grass. Mrs. Gardner of England, the Caroline Virginia Denton of the Southern States of America, was a contrast to Jane Crosby, unlike her in every feature, as she was different in appearance, thought, manners, feelings, from the Sleaford girls at Fitzroy Square. She was womanly to a fault—trusting, confiding, self-sacrificing, gentle, made to be loved—a beautiful creation, worthy of the Miltonic eulogium.

Clad in a cream-colored dress of soft linen, with a bit of crimson ribbon round the throat that heightened the rich brown depths of her complexion, she was sitting in the shade of an elm by the summer-house at "The Cottage," with a long bend of the valley before her, the placid river separating her from the little town of Essam, with its lichen-tinted stone houses, its church tower among the elms, and its ruined valley in the distance—a crumbling reminiscence of mitred abbots, superstitious kings, and battle-fields long since effaced by waving corn and thick green grass.

It was the joyous summer time. The valley pulsated with a never-resting but peaceful life. The dragon-fly poised its shimmering wings on the sedges down by the river. The lark was singing somewhere in the sky. The air was full of a mysterious, lulling, somnolent music. A thousand bees were busy in the budding limes. The perfume of the flowers tried in vain to compete with the scent-laden breeze that had kissed the swathes of newly-mown grass. Beneath the shadows of a willow-clad bend in the river, water-lilies invited the butterfly to come and rest in their yellow bosoms. Now and then the murmuring silence would be disturbed by the plunge of a rat taking a mid-day swim; or the plash of a fish, tempted from his retreat by some gayly-tinted fly. In the hayfields, flocks of young birds were trying their newly-fledged wings. The swallows sailed in curve and circle overhead. The mowers were resting in the shade, eating their frugal meal of cheese and salad, and passing round the yellow cider. The merry laugh of children at play came up from some hidden copse in the valley; and a summer haze hung about Essam, giving its gables, towers, and trees the delicate appearance of a soft poetical drawing against the sky, unreal in its very

natural reality, a dream of old houses, a passing fancy of elms and crows, of ruined abbeys and square church towers.

No wonder the heart of the woman to whom all this appealed in a thousand sympathetic ways was touched with its poetry; no wonder the soul melted in tender thoughts of the past, and in present love for the little one that lay asleep in her arms.

"Ah, my darling," she said in a voice of musical sweetness, "all this is indeed beautiful; you are born in a land of loveliness; not so glorious in its tall grasses and its great shadowy leaves, its mighty savannahs, as your mother's native land, but more beautiful in its sweet repose, its calm old ways, its nestling towns on river banks, and its everlasting greenness."

She was not looking at the child. Her eyes rested on the towers and gables of Essam.

"It is all like a dream; I sometimes think I am sleeping through a long, long fancy; and that I shall wake again in my once beautiful home among the cotton-fields, with the songs of the negroes coming up from the plantation. And then there is a troubled time, the tramp of soldiers, the hurrying of feet, the roar of cannon; great fires flash, and the clouds of smoke go up to the sky; then a weary flight on horseback, in rattling wagons, in boats at sea; and a time of poverty, of proud starvation; of a widowed father —old, sad, worn—longing to quit a land accursed, once so sweet and sunny, a country once so beautiful.

"'Maryland! My Maryland!'"

She tried to sing the touching lines, and burst into a flood of tears. The child slept on, though the hot agonizing drops fell upon its face. She bent down and kissed the pouting, cherry lips. They parted into a smile, as if the mother's touch had awakened happy dreams in the infant's slumbers.

"I'm very wicked, Willie," she said, "but it is not wrong to wish your grandfather could have lived to see you. William Graham Denton! That's your name, little one; it was his. May you be as good and fine a man! May your fate be cast in happier lines! To travel all this way in the hope of eventually laying his bones quietly and peacefully among strangers; and to be killed on landing. Oh cruel, cruel fate? It makes me feel wicked, Willie, in

spite of that soothing song the river is singing down there. Tristram Decker would have loved to hear that music. Who was he? Poor Tristram, he was a Federal officer, quite young, and altogether unlike the others who fought against the dear, martyred South; but your grandfather wouldn't forgive him. If men who go forth to slay each other only knew the true and noble hearts first, before they pierce them! Sometimes I think it is all wrong; that God has left His beautiful world to its fate, and no longer lifts His hand to protect the good or to punish the wicked. Ah, but you should have seen your grandfather! what a fine handsome man he was—tall and straight, with white hair. He was a king at home. I have often thought he was not himself in these latter days. He would talk to me for hours, as I am doing now to you, and he came to England. and brought me here without an object, without a plan, without any arrangement of any kind. He said we were journeying to the new Jerusalem, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the home of our fathers, where we would find out their memorial tablets in gray old churchyards. Ah, Willie, he was a great man once, with hundreds of slaves, with lands that stretched as far as the eye could see, with a great house twenty times as large as The Cottage, with shady verandahs about it; he was more of a king than an English monarch, and I was as gay and bright as yonder butterfly, as free and joyous as those swallows. They burnt that house down, and all the huts and cottages. Our servants fled. We had nowhere to rest the soles of our feet; and we could never more sing,

"'Maryland! My Maryland!'"

A young man, familiar to the reader as Tom Sleaford, but only known to the woman as Philip Gardner, sauntered from the cottage door and stood for a few minutes looking at her before she saw him. He was dressed in a light boating-jacket and trousers. He had, since we last met him, grown a beard and started an eyeglass. He put the foppish thing to his eye, and looked at the girllike mother and her infant.

"Talking to yourself again," he said, presently, in a tone of reproach.

"Ah, Philip!" she exclaimed, with pleased surprise; "I thought you had gone to London."

"I' m not going up till to-morrow," he replied, carelessly.

"Oh, I am very glad. Hush, don't wake the baby; I will take it to Susan."

She got up, lifting her infant load lovingly, and went into the house.

The Cottage was far more pretentious than its title would denote. It was an old-fashioned house, covered with creepers and nestling among trees. It was surrounded by a garden which, closed in at the back, broke away from walls in the front, where it ran into lawns, flower-beds, and clumps of foliage, ending in a sunk fence, beyond which, down to the river, The Cottage estate stretched in undulations of meadow lands dotted with sheep. The Cottage, house, farm, and estate, formed one of the prettiest in all the vale of Essam. It had been purchased some three years ago from its former owner by a local agent for Mr. Philip Gardner, who was understood to be a gentleman of means. He had bought it as it stood, furniture, stock, and everything, and paid cash down on the nail. The curiosity about the new-comer had nearly died out before he appeared. It was nine months before he came, and he did not call upon anybody. It was understood he had a wife. A lady was with him, at all events,—a loud, showy woman. They did not go to church. The rector called twice, but on neither occasion could he see the master or the mistress. A gay boat appeared on the river, and the loud laughter of more than one vulgar woman was heard in the evening as Mr. Gardner rowed them to the boat-house which he had built opposite his estate. Mr. Gardner was no other than Tom Sleaford, and The Cottage on the Avon will explain his regular though somewhat mysterious weekly absences from town. He had invested in this estate during Squire Kerman's merry days in London; he owned it before the Cemetery Company came to grief; he was its devil-may-care master, with plenty of money at his banker' s when he used to pretend to Kerman that he was short of cash.

The Asphalte Company was a flourishing concern; so was the Northern Ironworks, which he had bought and turned into a limited company. Old Sleaford had not the faintest idea of the money Tom had made; and Tom had not the faintest idea of letting anybody know what he was worth. To avoid suspicion, and with a view to protection against reverses, he had bought The Cottage estate in an assumed name. In London he was Tom Sleaford; at Essam

he was Philip Gardner, but he was very rarely seen by his neighbors. They did not think him worth knowing. The kind of life which had inaugurated the Gardner reign at The Cottage was not calculated to make a good impression on local opinion. Indeed, it was whispered over Essam tea-tables that the flaunting, vulgar lady they called Mrs. Gardner was not his wife at all, and that the lady visitors who came there were no better than they should be.

A change had, however, come over the scene when, some two years ago, a pretty, foreign-looking girl began to be seen in the gardens, or driving along the highways. There had been quite a flutter in the church with the old square tower when she appeared in The Cottage pew, which had been vacant so long. The strict families of the town resented the intrusion; and the rector had been informed that he must really inquire into the position and character of the lady. He had done so with politic care and discretion. Meeting Mr. Gardner at the station, he had entered the same railway carriage, and led up to the subject with clerical deftness. Mr. Gardner had been perfectly frank with him. "Quite right that you ask the question," he had said; "pray don't apologize. I have led a free life, but I have sown my wild oats. I am really married, and the lady about whom you are so complimentary is my wife, an American heiress, It is very good of you to say that under these circumstances Essam and the county society are open to us; we don't care for society; we have reasons for living quiet and retired, and I trust you will let us have our way, or I shall sell The Cottage and go somewhere else. All my time is occupied in perfecting an invention on which I have spent many years; when that is done I shall be rich enough to buy all Essam and the county too, and then, Mr. Rector, I hope to be a worthy and a liberal parishioner."

Mrs. Gardner, the pretty American, had, therefore, been permitted to go about without social molestation, and to attend church without comment, except as to her bonnets and dress. Not that Essam and the county cared to break in upon the privacy of The Cottage. They did not believe much in Mrs. Gardner. She was too pretty to be very good, certain of the ladies said. Moreover, the Gardners were up at all hours of the night; Mrs. Gardner dressed in such out of the way style; and all the men who chanced to meet her were in such raptures about her! She sang songs on a Sunday, and had been seen by people as they were

going to afternoon service, painting at an easel fixed up in the meadows. There was something weird and foreign about the woman, and Essam society preferred to give her a wide berth; though the people whom she had to meet once in a way were courteous to her more from fear than respect, for she had an imperious manner, an air of authority, the habit of being obeyed, which quickly put down any thought of insolence in man or woman. Nevertheless, Mrs. Gardner continued to be a mystery to Essam; and for herself it may be said that she lived a dreamy life, the reality of which she often doubted, sitting, as we see her now on summer days, talking to her infant in a half forgetful wandering manner, which did not please Mr. Sleaford, *alias* Philip Gardner.

"You're always muttering and talking to yourself," said Tom, when she came back to him.

"Am I, dear?" she said, her great black eyes turned towards him.

"Am I dear? Yes," he said.

"I think I was talking to the baby."

"It's the same thing. I don't like women who talk and mutter to themselves."

"You said I was not to talk to the people at Essam, dear, nor to the doctor, nor to the minister; and as you are only here two or three days a week, I suppose I have got into the bad habit that way."

"I didn't mean you were not to talk exactly; you ought to know what I meant."

"Yes."

"Yes," he repeated, mockingly. "Don't say yes in that silly way, as if you were a child, You know what I mean well enough. I don't want people talking about our affairs. gossiping and chattering about my business, what I do, where I go."

"Don't be angry," said the woman, timidly, linking her arm in his. "I never talk about our affairs; and as for what you do or where you go, I can't talk, because I don't know."

"You want to know; that's what's the matter."

"Not if you still object, love. But you promised to take me to London this summer, and show me the fine English ladies riding and driving in the Park; and I do so long to see London."

"You know what befel Eve. Her curiosity ruined both herself and her husband."

"But my curiosity is very mild, Philip. I don't want to hear anything more than you wish to tell me, and I have never seen any more of England than this."

"And isn't this good enough for you?"

"It is very beautiful—so may a birdcage be; but the occupant may get tired of seeing the same bars, however beautiful, forever."

"Oh, you're tired, are you? Very well, I will sell 'The Cottage' and we'll go somewhere else."

"Now, my dear Philip, don't say that."

"I find you a stranger, without a friend, without a home; I bring you here, I give you all a man can, and you are discontented."

"No!" exclaimed the woman, with something like a rebuke in her eyes.

"You hadn't a penny in the world. You have money in your purse, and every luxury. You repay me with ingratitude."

She took her arm away from his and stood still, her eyes flashing, the color leaving her olive face.

"Don't say that; I can't bear it. And I was not penniless, Philip."

"I will say it. I say you refuse my kindness with ingratitude."

"And I say you are cruel to say so."

"Cruel!"

He repeated the word with a sneer.

"Cruel and unmanly," she said, her lip quivering.

"Thank you."

"Is this the way English husbands treat their wives in return for love, devotion, the sacrifice of every thought and wish? Do you taunt them with the money you allow them, the food they eat?"

"Go on. I thought it would come out at last, all this talking to yourself. We'd better have it out."

"Yes, in heaven's name, let us, for my heart is bursting. For months past you have flung my poverty in my face, not openly as you have to-day, but by inference in little ways. I can't bear it. You will make me hate you."

"Well, upon my soul, that's nice. And is this the way American ladies treat their husbands, since you are making comparisons between the two countries?"

She made no reply.

"Go on, say all you think; don't mind me."

She flung herself upon the grass, and burst into tears.

He lifted her up, and carried her to the rustic seat where he had found her talking to their child. She sobbed bitterly. Her delicate frame trembled. She looked at him with a face full of passionate upbraiding.

"Now, I hope you'll be better. I've been expecting this for months. I knew the storm was brewing when I saw you talking to yourself again."

"There was no storm," she sobbed. "My heart was full of love and tenderness."

"Was it? Then it's a pity your heart should falsify your tongue."

"Don't talk to me in that cold way; you will drive me mad."

She sobbed between every word, and the tears rained down her face. Yet a lark was singing overhead, and the sweet perfume of flowers played around her, breathing of nothing but love and peace.

"You don't expect me to speak to you affectionately after what you have said?"

"Then go away," she exclaimed, leaping to her feet. "Leave me, if you have a heart that neither tears nor anguish can touch."

She flung back her hair, that had half fallen upon her shoulders, and stood before him with her eyes flashing, her white teeth gleaming between her parted lips.

"Philip Gardner, my husband, the only person—man or woman—whom I can call friend in England, the only person who knows me, I have striven to think of no one else, I have put all the world aside but you, to you and to our little one I give the entire confidence of my heart; I want to have some response, some little return; and I am content to live a dreamless, purposeless life, if that pleases you—to live for you only, to be moved only by your whims and fancies; but my pride will not let me put up with insult as well as neglect. I am content to be your slave, but you must not taunt me with my dependence, my origin, my poverty. Let me be a slave and a creature of your will, but don't tell me of it, and let your lip curl into a sneer. If you stood there with a whip and lashed me, you could not hurt me so much as you do when you look at me as you did just now."

"All right," said Mr. Gardner, taking out a match, lighting a cigar, and turning on his heel.

She watched him with a dull expression of surprise. When he had disappeared, she returned to her seat, her eyes fixed upon the gate, which he had closed behind him, as he coolly strolled away into the meadows that led down to the river, As he disappeared, she saw a figure outside the hedge pause and look wistfully at her. It was a pale, thoughtful sad face, and it looked at her with unutterable tenderness. "Tristram!" she exclaimed, and as she spoke the vision faded into the sunny air.

CHAPTER II.

VISIONS OF FORBIDDEN LOVE.

"He is gone now, my darling; your father has gone to London, and I must talk to you or I shall go crazy. Kiss mamma, love."

The little one pursed up its chubby lips and kissed its mother. It was sitting on a crimson shawl in the midst of a hillock of hay. Mamma was kneeling beside it. They made a beautiful picture in the shade of the oak-trees at a bend of the hayfield outside The Cottage garden, bordering the Essam wood, that stretched away in leafy splendor for nearly a mile behind them. The wood was shut out by a long, luxuriant hedgerow.

It was a hot July afternoon. The mowers had left the grass to dry. The birds were still. Only a purple butterfly alighted here and there upon the haycocks. The wild hop and the white convolvuluses climbed in and out of the hedge. The distant call and clapper of the bird-boy came up from the cornfields like an echo.

"Sometimes I think I am a little mad, baby, don't you, dear? Never so mad as not to love you. I wonder if you will grow up to become tired of mamma; to look at her aside, and say unkind things to her?"

"Coo-coo," said the baby stretching out its little arms.

"Bless you, my sweetie!"

She kissed it, and filled its lap with hay.

"I am going to tell you something Willie; I shouldn't tell you, only I know you can't understand it. I wouldn't tell you for the world if I thought you could."

"Coo-coo," said Willie.

"Yes, I know it loves mamma, and it likes mamma to say silly things to it, doesn't it?"

"Coo-coo," replied the baby.

"Well then, there was a poor young man in New York —I don't mean poor as to money, but I say poor, because I pity him—and his name was Tristram Decker."

She looked round as if to make sure there were no listeners. A solitary peewit in the wood seemed to make answer in its melancholy way, and assure her of a faithful sentinel on duty. "Peewit!" it cried, and still further away came up the hollo of the bird-boy.

"I think the birds and things begin to know us, Willie; they think they know how lonely mamma is, and they want to comfort her."

A squirrel looked down from the oak trees and whisked away, as if to tell his companions not to come and disturb the pretty people down by the hedgerow.

"What was I saying? Oh, I know; now listen."

The baby tossed the hay from its lap and laughed.

"Yes, that's fine! Oh, what a strong boy!"

She kissed the chubby face, and then, re-seating the little one upon its crimson carpet, said,—

"Hush! Now I'm going to talk. I know where I was; that poor young man in New York. He loved mamma, he would have died for her; sometimes I think he is dying for her now. I saw him this very day last week looking over the hedge in the garden. Hush! Don't be frightened, and I'll tell you all about it."

"Coo-coo," said the baby.

"Papa had been unkind again to mamma, very unkind; oh, so cruel, so cruel! and I wished I was dead but for you, dear, but for you; and when Philip turned away as if I had been a black slave—yes, worse than mamma ever treated the worst colored woman on her father's plantation —just then, when I thought my heart would break, Tristram Decker looked at me over the hedge. Hush, dear, it wasn't him, it was his spirit; and I think he must have died for me, unless somehow his heart felt the ache of mine, and he was so sorry that the good angels let his soul free for a moment to say it was sorry. Do you think he's dead, baby?"

The baby held up its face to be kissed.

"You do," said the mother, putting her arms round the child and kissing it. "You do; then I have no friend in the world, Willie. Even if he were alive, he could be no friend of mine, dear, because he loves me; it wouldn't be right, dear. Strange, is it not? It wouldn't be right, because he loves me so much that he would die for me. But you mustn't be sorry for him; he fought in the war against us, and your grandfather cursed him, as he cursed all the North, and so I came to be here. Do you think mamma really did see that poor young man, or is solitude and neglect afflicting her mind?"

"Coo-coo," responded little Willie.

"Are you real? Or are you a fairy-child sent to play with me? I believe you are as wise as I, Willie—you may easily be wiser. I'm only a child, a wayward child, and I am naughty, too. They have given me a new and beautiful world to live in, and I was wicked enough to call it a cage. But I am a foreigner here—a creature who doesn't belong to these beautiful woods and fields, though they do try to make me welcome; and if it weren't for poor Willie, I should wander away over yonder hills, or perhaps go and lay me down in the river, by the side of the lilies. I daren't take you along, because you are not all mine, darling, and so I stay here to play with you, that the good people may not say I am ungrateful."

The baby had looked into its mother's eyes, and, as if under their loving influence, had gradually moved into an attitude of repose and slept.

She lay down beside it, and her voice fell into a gentle whisper.

"I wonder who you are like,—not like Philip, not like me. May you be unlike in your heart, unlike in your fortunes! When you grow to be a man, be kind to the memory of your mother; and for her sake be gentle and loving to all women, they are so weak and obedient; and oh, may you never know the heart-ache which your mother has suffered these last few weeks,—if you do, you will hate your father, as I am beginning to hate him!"

Her voice grew louder. She rose to her feet.

"For these last seven days I have suffered a lifetime of misery; insulted, treated with scorn, sneered at; it is four days since he has spoken to me. I have asked his forgiveness, I have kneeled to him, he doesn't speak. I, Caroline

Denton? Why, I don't think my heart stood still as it did in presence of Philip, when I fled with my father at night, and we stopped to look back and saw the house in flames, and heard the cries of the men, who neither gave nor received quarter."

A woman entered the field at the furthermost corner. Caroline saw her, and straightway took up the sleeping child.

"Dorothy is coming, darling, we must go; I don't know whether she is a good woman or a bad one, but we must go now."

Nurse and mistress met in the middle of the field. Mrs. Gardner laid the child in the arms that were put out to receive it.

"Why lor, bless me, missus, you'll have a sunstroke if you don't mind!" said Dorothy, a bony, weatherbeaten woman, in a lilac print dress and a white sun-bonnet.

"We were in the shade all the time, Dorothy," Mrs. Gardner replied, submissively.

"Master has been looking everywhere for you."

"The master?"

"Yes, he's bin and come back—lost the train or something; and he seems to be in a fine way."

"What about, Dorothy?" asked Mrs. Gardner, increasing her pace towards the house.

"Lor bless me, I don't know, but he looked as frightened as if he'd seen a ghost."

"A what!" exclaimed Mrs. Gardner.

"A ghost. There, don't stare at me like that, missus; I declare you gave me a regular start."

All at once Mrs. Gardner felt as guilty as if Tristram Decker had really come to visit her, and had been met by her husband on the threshold of The Cottage. A thousand fears crowded into her heart, as if the very ghost of the North American could dishonor her fair fame in the eyes of her husband.

"A ghost!" she said again. "Lor, no, there are no ghosts in the middle of the day, though one 'ud think you'd seen one, to look at you."

"Yes, I feel frightened, Dorothy."

"What at? your own shadow, mum?"

"I don't know."

"There, don't fluster yourself; don't go into the house like that, specially with a visitor in the drawing-room."

"A visitor?'

"Yes, we don't have no visitors as a rule, but this is the exception."

"What's he like?"

"How did you know it were a he, mum?"

"Is he pale, and has he blue eyes, and is he young?"

She had the vision-face before her.

"Pale! He's a red-faced, gray-bearded, pompous party, and the other's not young either, though he's dressed up to the nines, as they says at Essam."

"Two visitors?"

"Yes, I said there was two."

"Did you?"

"A course I did. And they come in with master, and they was a-having 'igh words, when I thought as I'd come out and see where you was."

"What were they saying?"

"I dunno, except as one of 'em kept a-calling master Mr. Slyboots, as he said, 'Don't expec' me to call you Gardner. Nothing of the kind," he said. 'Though he does keep a gardener, I expec', and a good 'un,' says the other, which he talked like a Scotchman; the very image of Scotch Jimmy, as keeps a grocery shop at Essam."

"Friends of your master, I suppose, from London," said Mrs. Gardner, not willing to learn anything to his disadvantage from a servant.

"Friends, well I should say as they was enemies; and if he owed 'em a lot of money, or something worse, they couldn't have treated him more disrespectful."

"You have made some mistake," Mrs. Gardner said, with dignity.

"That's what the Scotch gentleman said master had made, thinking as he could go on without bein' found out."

"Silence, woman!" said Mrs. Gardner; "don't you see that you annoy me. How dare you pry into your master's affairs and talk of them to me! I tell you you have made some mistake."

"Thank you, missus; somebody has made a mistake, but it ain't Dorothy Migswood. Woman, indeed! I'd like you to remember as you ain't talking to black nigger slaves when you're talking to me, mum."

"You need not remind me of the fact, nurse," said Mrs. Gardner; "they were human, if they were black."

"Oh, they was; then carry your brat yourself, Miss Slave Driver!" exclaimed Migswood, thrusting little Willie into

the mother's arms. "If I ain't as good as a black nigger slave, I ain't good enough to carry this thing."

Little Willie woke up and cried. His mother hastily folded him to her breast, and hurried through the garden-gate, where Tristram Decker had looked at her and disappeared.

"A parcel of stuck-up minxes; one would think they was Queen Victoria herself and all the royal family instead of a lot of no-better-than-they-should-be's."

Dorothy Migswood said this for the benefit of the head fly-driver from the Lion, who was waiting in the road with a cab, and talking to a stranger.

"You haint in a good temper this morning," said the driver, "Mrs. Migswood."

"Don't call me Mrs., I'm Miss, and don't pretend to be no more, though I have brought up a family."

The driver leaned back and laughed a loud guffaw.

"Who's your friend?" she asked, looking at a little ugly man, who was sucking a short pipe and leaning against the gate.

"Meaning me," said the stranger, winking at the driver. "I'm Bill Smith, and when I'm at 'ome, which ain't often, I lives in the Ole Kent Road."

He was a small man, with what might be called accentuated features. His boots were down at the heel; his hat was shiny and stuck on one side; his clothes were a dingy black; the sleeves of his coat nearly covered his hands. Two glossy tufts of hair were curled and flattened against his cheeks. His mouth was an aperture that closed tightly, so that sometimes it only looked like an indication of a mouth. His nose had been broken: and he had a tantalizing squint.

"Oh, you are a Londoner, are you," said Miss Migswood, "like master? You're a gay old lot, you folks in London."

"We air, we air," said Bill Smith, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and putting the black cutty in his pocket.

"And what do you want down here?"

"Come to see you, my dear; that's what we're arter; that's our little game."

Bill Smith grinned a ghastly smile.

"Well, you aren't much in the way of beauty in London if you're a specimen," said Dorothy, sticking her arms akimbo, her flapping sun-bonnet falling back upon her broad bony shoulders

The fly-driver roared with laughter.

"Beauty's only skin-deep—we goes in for brains in town," said Smith.

"And where do you carry yours—in your boots? They looks as if they was weighted."

The fly-driver nearly had a fit. The horse thought this was a signal to move; Bill Smith had to take it by the head.

"I never see such a pair in my life," gasped the driver.

"As his ears?" asked Dorothy, looking at Bill Smith's head.

"Well, you air a caution," was the Londoner's answer. "You knows your way about. I used to think I was good at chaff, but you licks me; that's truth."

"I can't stop a talking here all day. What's up?" said Miss Migswood, pulling her bonnet over her head; "and my complexion will go if I stands in the sun."

"My sides is regular aching," remarked the fly-driver.

"Oh, you're easily pleased," responded Migswood; "every fool in Essam knows that."

The Lion's head driver laughed again, and mopped his face with his handkerchief; for the sun was coming down "a 'ot un," as Bill Smith had more than once observed.

"Well, now, look'ere, Miss Migswood; as you seems the right sort, and as business may bring us together, I don't mind telling you a secret."

"Don't bust yourself about it," said Dorothy. "I don't think business nor nothing else will bring you and me together; so if the thought as it will makes you free with your secrets, keep 'em, and then you won't be disappointed."

"Ha! ha!" roared the Lion driver, "trust Dorothy Migswood; she's got the tongue of old 'Arry hisself."

"Oh, come, you're a presuming on your petticoats," said Mr. Smith. "If you don't want to be friendly, why there ain't no love lost, and the least said soonest mended, and so mum's the word."

Bill Smith hit his open mouth with his open hand. The result was a hollow sound, like drawing a bung from a barrel."

"All right, I'm in no hurry; you arn't the first bum-bailiff I've seen, and there's a chap in Essam as can play the drum on his cheeks, and draw corks forty to the dozen;

he'd give you ninety in a hundred and jump on you," said Dorothy.

Turning her back on Mr. Smith, of the Old Kent Road, she made a face at the driver from the Lion, and marched into the pretty garden of The Cottage, leaving the Londoner staring in amazement, and the countryman shaking the cab with his laughter.

"Baint she a clever un?" he said at last.

"A clever un," exclaimed Bill Smith, contemptuously, "she's a——"

It was a word we cannot print.

"I'll let 'er see! A what did she call me?"

"A bum-bailiff," said the driver, coming promptly to his rescue.

"She's a liar! That ain't my profession; and if I thought I looked like it, blame me if I wouldn't chop my 'ed off, there now!"

He took out his pipe and relighted it.

"A bum!" he exclaimed. "Why, what sort of a bring-in' up 'as that woman 'ad?"

"Bringing hup; why she's the most audacious lot in all the county; she's bin in prison, she's bin in London, she's bin in the workus, she's bin had up for 'saulting a magistrate; and for all that there's lots a folk as 'ud give anything to hear 'er talk, she's such a witty un."

"She's a fool."

"Not she! Whatever she may be, she baint a fool."

"A woman as can't tell a respectable sheriff's hofficer, who's never touched a common distress in 'is life, from a two bob a day man, and his grub, I tell you is a fool. Me! Bill Smith, of the Old Kent Road—me! as 'as took possession of palaces and bin in *fi. fas.* and *ca. sas.* for thousands, to be mistook for a man shoved in for rent, why, blame 'er, I've 'ad the maid of a marchingness to wait on me."

"Come, guvnor, you're taking of it too much to 'art; she be only a joking of you."

"There's one thing, Mister Coachman, as no perfessional man likes, and that is, aspershions on his perfessional position. But there, as you says, it don't matter, you can't expec more nor a grunt from a hanimal of that sort."

"Shshsh!" said Mister Coachman, "don't you let her 'ear you. She'd think no more about a knocking you down than I do a whisking them flies off that horse's back."

"Wouldn't she?" said Mr. Smith, quickly. "Do you know what I could give her for that?"

"I don't know, and I'm sure she don't care," said the driver.

"Three months; and s'help me if I wouldn't do it, there!"

"Are you from the Lion?" said a quick, anxious voice, breaking in upon the dialogue of town and country

"Yes, sir," replied the driver, quickly.

The new-comer was Mr. Tom Sleaford, pale and careworn. He flung a hand-bag into the open fly, and got in after it.

"Drive me to the Penfield Station, and come back for the two gentleman afterwards," he said, quickly. "The mid-day express stops at Penfield?"

"Yes, sir."

"And not at Essam?"

"No, sir."

"Catch the express and I'll give you a crown for yourself."

"Yes, sir."

Bill Smith watched the carriage roll along the road until it was lost in a cloud of summer dust.

"Good-by Mister Sleaford, *alias* Mr. Philip Gardinger; this "'ere ansum cottage estate, in a ring fence, to be sold by auction, with all the wery choice and helegant furniture and heffects, without reserve. Harticles of virtue, hold china, billiard-tables, wines of the finest wintages, by order of the Sheriff of Middlesex; and I only 'ope, Mister Sleaford, financer, director, manager, and general swell, that's the werry worst thing as'll 'appen to you; that's all the 'arm I wishes you, sir, and a pleasant journey to you. I 'ope the sherry wine's good, Mr. Sleaford, junior. If there's anythink I 'ates more nor another, it is bad sherry wine; but give me a good dinner and a bottle of old brown, with a Madeiry flavor, and I wouldn't call the Queen my aunt—s'help me!"

CHAPTER III.

THE AWAKENING.

"ARE you the person they call Mrs. Philip Gardner?" said Mr. Maclosky Jones to the southern woman, as she entered the dining-room, where that gentleman and Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson were sitting, examining a pile of papers.

She had laid the baby in its cot.

"I am Mrs. Gardner," she replied.

"Puir body!" said Maclosky, looking up at the trembling woman: "that man has deceived you."

She stood by the table, her left hand leaning upon it for support.

"I don't understand you," she said with an anxious look at Mr. Robinson, who laid down a cigar which he had been smoking.

"Don't tell her so bluntly," said Robinson, stopping Maclosky, who was about to reply.

"I don't see the gude o' beating about the bush," said the Scotchman, tying up a parcel of papers with red tape; "the truth is jest the truth, however you may hedge it about with fine phrases."

Mrs. Gardner stood motionless, as if she were in a dream.

"Before you ask us any questions," said Robinson, in something like a tone of compassion, "you had perhaps better retire to some room and read this letter which Mr. Gardner left for you."

He held out a sealed envelope. She took it mechanically, and went to the bedroom where her child was sleeping in a pretty swan cot. The infant lay there like a fairy child in a fairy nest, the great wings of the bird seeming to shield it from contact with the vulgar world.

The window was wide open. The leaves of a luxuriant creeper nodded at the casement, and made shadows on the linen covered carpet.

Mrs. Gardner opened the letter. There fell out upon the floor a parcel of bank-notes. She looked at them carelessly, and then read as follows:

"DEAR CAROLINE,—Our short time of pleasure is over. The separation will possibly please you, as you have evidently ceased to care for me or The Cottage. I am ruined in purse and possibly in character. I enclose you five hundred pounds, enough to take you back to America, and set you up in some little business. You are free. All is fair in love and war. I deceived you. My name is not Gardner, and I am not your husband. Good-by for ever.

"PHIL."

She read the letter word by word, mastering its contents wholly, though every sentence stabbed her to the heart. She put her hand to her head, closed her eyes, and opened them again, as if to assure herself that she was not dreaming. She looked at the letter in her hand, at the notes on the floor. She saw the shadows of the leaves trembling on the carpet. The sweet breath of the fields came in at the open window, and she recognized its perfume. She looked at the cot, and thought for the first time how beautiful it was. She walked to the dresssing-table, and looked at herself in the glass. A deep sigh seemed to acknowledge the fact that her face was very sad. Then she looked at the letter again, and finally, breaking out into a low moan, she said, "Father! Tristram!" It was a wailing, subdued cry—the utterance of a wellnigh broken heart. "Father, father!" and "Tristram, Tristram!" she cried in her agony.

The child started and opened its wondering eyes.

"Willie," she said, "little Willie."

It whimpered. She took it into her arms, and pressed it closely to her bosom.

"Perhaps it is not true. I am his wife. That part of his cruel letter must be false. God knows I wouldn't have fallen so low, and known it."

She moaned again, and looked vaguely about the room. Then she sat down upon a chair, and rocked the child, which put its arms round her neck.

"My darling Willie!" she said, "I think I am having a bad dream: let your baby heart pray that mamma may wake.'

There was a knock at the door. She paid no attention to it. The woman Migswood entered.

"This is a nice go," she said. "What are you going to do?"

Mrs. Gardner made no reply. She went on rocking the child and herself to and fro.

"You'll have to find another man now, and you'll easy do that; many on 'em likes a bit of a pretty thing like you, and you needn't go far to find a better than him as has gone and left yer. They're a mean set, men, best on 'em; only way's to pay 'em out in their own coin."

The words fell unheeded upon Mrs. Gardner.

"Oh, you're going to sulk. Well, do as you likes; I've stood your airs long enough not to mind 'em much, and I never treads on them as is down; I've been down myself too often."

"Do you remember the day that I was married, Migswood; when I was ill, you know; soon after they buried father?" said Mrs. Gardner, looking up inquiringly.

"I suppose you didn't hear what I was saying on just now?"

"I never remembered it myself quite clearly."

"She's gone daft," said Migswood to herself; but in response to the question she said aloud, "Married! Why, lor, you never really means to say as you thinks you was married?"

"Not married?" exclaimed the American beauty, as if realizing the situation now for the first time.

She rose to her feet, laid the child once more in its cot, and taking Migswood by the arm, she drew her aside.

"You are a woman, whatever else you may be," she said, earnestly looking into the hard, vulgar face of the servant. "He says he is not my husband; you echo him, and say I am not married. What does it mean? What is the matter? Am I dreaming, or am I awakening?"

"It depends what you calls dreaming. I never thought for a moment as you was married, nor nobody else. Why, there was two or three Mrs. Gardners afore you come to The Cottage."

"Two or three!" gasped the dupe.

"How do you think you could be married without knowing it?"

"Don't you remember when I got up after I had lain

ill, and Philip took me to the city, and we came home, and you had a new gown, and the servants had a feast?"

"I remember that," said Migswood, smiling a contemptuous but half-piteous smile.

Mrs. Gardner rushed to a cabinet. The key was in the lock. She opened the drawer.

"Ah it is gone!" she cried; "it is gone!"

She opened every other drawer in the cabinet.

"What was you looking for."

"The certificate of our marriage."

"Ah, you may look."

"It was in that drawer."

"Was it?"

"Don't you believe me?"

"Oh, yes, if you say so."

"I have read it, had it in my hand; Philip told me to keep it in that drawer."

"I wouldn't bother about t if I was you," said Migswood, watching her in an amused and not altogether dissatisfied manner. "What name was he married in?"

"Gardner, of course. Oh, what is all this mystery?'

"No mystery as I see on. What do he say hisself?" The gents downstairs tell me as he's writ you a letter."

"Read it," she said, giving her the paper.

"I can't read," said Migswood; "what do he say?"

The servant stooped down and picked up the notes.

"Be this the money as he's left for yer? They said he'd put some in the letter."

"That is your master's money," said Mrs. Gardner.

Migswood laid it upon the table.

"Master's money!" said the woman mockingly. "Why don't you ha' done with your fine airs. A pretty master! I ain't got no master and no husband no more than you have, and the sooner you gets that into your wool-gathering little noddle the better."

Caroline Denton stood still and looked at the woman without seeing her, for her eyes were straining to follow her thoughts, which went over all the course of her life in England; her father's death; Philip Gardner's kindness: her removal from the hotel near the scene of the fatal accident, by which she lost her father, to The Cottage; her surprise and fear when she found herself the inmate of her benefactor's house; his respectful kindness, followed by the offer of his hand; her gratitude; her struggle to forget

Tristram Decker, whom she found she had begun to love; her resolve to obey the commands of her father, even though he were dead; her marriage to Philip at the Proctor or Registrar's office, as he called it; his strange habits since then; his mysterious comings and goings; and latterly his unkindness to her. She sought for a clue to her position. She began to doubt and fear.

"I will go to the place where we were married," she said: "that shall be cleared for Willie's sake. I must not give way; I must be bold and courageous for Willie. This is not the first time I have seen trouble."

"Yes, you'll want all your wits about you, but I wouldn't bother if I were you; none of the other women did. When the game was over they just hooked it, and made no fuss. But I expect he took some trouble with you.

"The other women," repeated Mrs. Gardner, "the other women——"

"I told you of 'em just now. None of them pretended as they were married."

In spite of her brave efforts to stand up against the calamity that had befallen her, Mrs. Gardner, or Caroline Denton, whichever was her rightful name, staggered against the wall, and stood there with her hand upon her heart, uttering that cry of pain and wailing which had shaped itself into two words, "Father! Tristram!" when first she began to realize her trouble.

"Don't give way," said Migswood.

"Tell me all," said Caroline, in a hoarse whisper; "all."

"That's wot the gents downstairs said I'd better do."

"Tell me all. I am a poor, weak, foolish woman—a stranger; I know nothing—nothing."

"The gents downstairs 'as took regular possession of The Cottage. Mr. Gardner, as he calls himself, ain't bin honest, they says, and they has warrants to sell up The Cottage, and they thinks you'd better go into lodgings."

"Yes?"

"And they say as they suppose you knows as his name weren't Gardner at all, and they has no objections to your taking away any little things as you may have set your mind on."

"What do they mean?"

"I wish you wouldn't put on so much side, as they says at Essam. You can't be so awful green as you makes out."

Caroline looked at her in blank amazement.

"Come now, do you mean to say as you thinks he ever took you to London at all? The other women used to call him Charlie; it's always Charlies with us sort, I think, but you preferred Phil. Well now, really, is American girls so jolly innocent as all that?"

"I don't quite know what you mean, but I can see by your face that you are insulting me, and that you are cruel. No American woman would stamp on another in trouble."

"Why, I've heard you tell that baby o' yourn of wars and murders as Americans done again you. But, there, it's no business o' mine, only you keeps on a axin' of me questions, and if you really are so blessed innocent as you makes out, why, it won't do no harm to open your eyes a bit. Now, for hinstance, you says Mr. Charlie—beg parding, Mr. Gardner—took you to London and married you and you had the writings?"

"Yes."

"Sure it were London?"

"Yes."

"You'd never seen it before?"

"No, nor since."

"My belief is as you never see it at all."

"Why do you say that? I could take you to the very hotel where we dined."

"Well, I dunno; you started in the morning and were back at night. It could be done, oh, yes. But there, it's no business of mine."

"Yes it is; don't be unkind. I am sure we went to London I can never forget the busy streets, the carriages, the crowded stages, the noise and din."

"Then I'm wrong. It was London, of course; and why shouldn't it be? Oh, yes, it were London, of course."

"Why, then, do you try to make me believe I have been mad or dreaming? Why do you like to torture me?"

"I baint a torturing of you. I be only answering what you axes me. But you do act so it sets my teeth on edge. Good gracious, you ain't the first girl that's gone wrong."

Caroline looked at the savage woman out of her sad, sorrowful eyes, which would have rebuked any other she-dragon but Migswood, who bore the appeal with perfect equanimity. She insisted upon regarding Mrs. Gardner as a woman who, in spite of a show of virtue, had fallen to her level; and it rather rejoiced her than otherwise to have so good-looking a companion in sin and misfortune.

"You are a hard, cruel woman."

"Thank yer."

"What have I done that you should be so pitiless to me?"

"Oh, well, there, if you're going to call names I'll go; mayhap I will lose my temper, and then I might shake you."

Migswood surveyed her victim with a calm, cold expression.

"I can't abear to have you a domineering over me in your 'igh virtuous way, as if I wos dirt. It ain't what you says, it's what you looks. I know what I am, and don't set up for no better. But——"

"Don't shout at me; I am very sorry; I didn't mean to be unkind. I ask your pardon. I shall not trouble you much longer. Are those persons you spoke of still in the house?"

"Yes, and they be going to stay all night; and the bum-bailiff, he's in the kitchen."

Caroline took the sleeping child out of the cot, and went down to the dining-room.

"Is this true that my servant tells me?" she asked.

"What does she tell you, ma'am?" was Maclosky's cautious reply.

"That my husband is a fugitive; that his name is not Gardner; that I have been duped; that you are the rightful owners of this cottage."

"I dinna ken about your being duped, but the man who wrote the letter you hold in your hand, who called himself Gardner, is a bankrupt; he has been living a life of debauchery for years, and you are not the first, nor second, nor third mistress who have lived with him here."

"Sir, I am no mistress, I am his lawful wife, married according to your English law, and till to-day I had the record of it."

"What, the certificate?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where were you married, ma'am?

"In London."

"In church?"

"No."

"Before a Registrar?"

"We went to an office, where they asked questions, and put our names in a book, and gave my husband a document"

"Did he say his name was Philip Gardner?"

"Yes."

"He lied there then, and can be prosecuted for it; but I dinna think it vitiates the marriage."

"Will you show me the authority under which you act?"

"The officer has it; he's down in the kitchen."

"I will go and fetch it," said Robinson, leaving the room, and returning with the sheriff's warrant of distress, which Mrs. Gardner looked at.

"If it were not for this letter I should think my husband were the victim of a conspiracy."

"Indeed!" said Maclosky. "Would ye like to see what the newspapers say on the subject?"

He took a paper from his pocket.

"I don't think I would harass the lady any further," said Robinson.

"She'd better know the truth," said Maclosky, handing a newspaper to Caroline, with a marked paragraph to the following effect:

"THE ROMANCE OF FRAUD.—A gentleman who, for several years, has been residing on a pretty estate in the Vale of Essam, where his doings have surprised and scandalized the respectable families of that district, turns out to be the director and manager of certain companies now in course of liquidation, in which frauds to a considerable amount have been detected. Mr. Philip Gardner is the assumed name of this director, who will, we understand, be declared bankrupt to-morrow. His delightful retreat on the Avon will speedily come under the hammer, and in these evil days there will not possibly be wanting sympathizers who will regard the downfall of the Essam landowner with some amount of sorrow, because he furnished his residence with choice pictures and rare china, thus redeeming his vulgar crime by proving himself to be a man of taste. We refrain from mentioning the young man's real name, out of respect for his father, who is known in the city as an upright man, and who is, we believe, a serious sufferer by his son's defalcations."

"There, mem, that's a clear straightforward statement," said Maclosky, folding up the paper and laying it down carefully upon the table.

"His father," said Caroline; "he told me his father was dead."

"And you'd better jest consider that it's true, for you

might as well try to get butter out of a dog's mouth, or justice out of a liquidator, as anything out of him; for he jest hates ye, woman,—he jest regards you and such like as the ruin of his son."

The woman looked at him. She only half understood what he said.

"Is there anything else I can do for ye?" asked the Scotchman.

She made no reply.

"Look here, my dear," said Robinson, rising and putting his arm familiarly on her shoulder.

She recoiled from his touch.

"Oh, well, if we stand on our dignity so much, I have done," said Robinson, who had cast bold and admiring glances at her during the painful scene. "I was going to give you some good advice."

She turned away from him without a word, and, addressing herself to Mr. Maclosky Jones, said,—

"I'm a foreigner here, and don't understand your customs. I am an entire stranger; which is the way to London?"

"The most sensible question ye could ask, though I'd take a steamer from Liverpool if I were a going to America."

She made no reply.

"The Essam station is jest close by, and I'll order the carriage to take ye whenever ye conclude to go. You've got money, I understand, and we're not disposed to tak it away from ye. I dinnat hold wi' turning a young person adrift without funds."

"Good day, sir; I don't think I'll trouble you any further."

Before Mr. Maclosky Jones had time to reply she left the room.

"A pretty impudent baggage!" said Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson.

"Jest the sairt o' woman to tempt a saint. Did ye regard her black 'een? Aye, mon, I've seen the day I could jest o' fallen deep in love with a wee bit foreigner lassie like that. She didna seem to regard your insinuatin' ways, I'm thinkin."

"She's a fool!" said Robinson.

CHAPTER IV.

FALLEN AMONG THIEVES.

"You want a lodging? Ah, bless yer swate face! said an old woman, pushing her way to Caroline's side, as she stood bewildered among the crowd of passengers just emptied into the gaslight upon the arrival platform of the Great Western Railway at Paddington. "A nice clean place as ever ye see; ah, let me carry the baby for ye."

The passenger—yesterday mistress of that lovely retreat on the Avon, to-day a fugitive and a wanderer—hugged the infant close to her breast, as the woman known as Irish Moll put out her arms.

"Ah, well, then, I'll not touch the darlint. The saints bless and kape it; but you've travelled a long way, and you're a stranger intirely, and what'll I do for ye at all?"

"Is this your luggage?" asked a porter, coming up to Mrs. Gardner, with a small bag in his hand.

"Yes," said the woman.

"Are you expecting somebody to meet you, or can I get you a cab?" asked the porter, bent rather upon his fee than upon rendering assistance.

"No," said Irish Moll promptly, "she just wants a lodging for the night, and I'm the woman she's expecting to get it for her."

Though accustomed to see many strange people, it occurred to the porter that there was something peculiar in the association of these two women—one of them delicate, beautiful, ladylike, for he could see that the passenger was all this even in the gaslight; the other a common, shuffling Irishwoman, who might have been a huckster, an orange-seller, or the director of a low lodging-house. Before he had time to do more than let the curious contrast of the figures flash through his muddled brain, his services were required in another direction, and he laid the hand-bag from Essam down by its owner and disappeared.

"Ah, give the bag to me; sure an' I'll carry it for ye. Come away with Molly, and I'll get you some tay and a

bloater, and make ye as comfortable as the fine house you've left."

Caroline allowed herself to be led away. A stranger, bewildered and alone—the unaccustomed noise, the lights, the cries of porters, cabs dashing to and fro, people pushing hither and thither—it seemed as if this kindly speaking old woman was providentially sent to her help. She was ready to lean upon any one, lest the cruel crowd should sweep over her like a torrent and leave her stranded.

"Let me take hould ov yer arm, darlint," said Irish Moll; "ye are not used to this big town. Come aways wid ye, and we can find yer frinds in the mornin'."

In and out between cabs and horses, over the road, and into a street of shops, with here and there a blaze of light illuminating the two figures, the one grim, fawning, shuffling, and leading the other, a slight, well-dressed girl, with a child in her arms. It was eleven o'clock. The heat of the sun had left behind it a clammy haze. From streets of shops and blazing gin palaces they came to a region of houses packed together in rows, with here and there groups of men and women standing in the doorways, or lolling out of the windows to try and catch a breath of fresh air, but only succeeding in picking up the odors of stale vegetables or whiffs of strong tobacco.

"Ah, ye mustn't mind the looks of Porter's Buildings; we aren't rich, any of us, but we're honest and we're clane: and Molly Maloney isn't the woman to bring ye anywhere wheres ye'll not be comfortable."

More than once Mrs. Gardner was on the point of resisting her guide's well-assumed authority; but it seemed as if the woman read her thoughts and combated them with reassuring words, and appeals to the saints and testimonials to her own honesty.

They reached a narrow passage.

"There, now, we'll soon be at home," said Irish Moll, "and a cup of tay will cheer ye."

Irish Moll opened the door of a small house and brought the traveller into a room furnished as a bed and sitting-room combined. The darkness was made dimly visible by a lamp which gave forth more odor than light. But Molly Maloney, as the old hag delighted to call herself, turned the light up, and it fell, as if with a flash of surprise, upon the pale face of Caroline Denton, seated in a chair, and looking in a blank kind of way at nothing.

It might have occurred to her that the change from The Cottage to Porter's Buildings was something too dreadful to think of; but no such thought troubled her. She had a vague desire in her mind to find out whether she was legally married or not. And since she had left The Cottage this desire had almost given way to fear that inquiries would only lead to a miserable and unhappy discovery. Her leading idea at the outset had been to fly from Essam; to put The Cottage and its new possessors behind her; to get away from the brutal taunts of Migswood; to shut out the scene of her shame. Once she had thought of seeking consolation and inspiration at her father's grave, and then it dawned upon her that she did not know where he was buried. In that awful hour, when he was carried to a wayside hotel, dead before her face, she had lost all consciousness of things, and had more or less remained in a state of insensibility for many days. She remembered, during her waking moments, a kind voice, a constant attendant upon her, a young man who said he was her father's friend, and who ministered to her every want, only at the last to cast her adrift, a waif and stray upon the world. She had no papers in her possession as to her identity, no record of her father's death, no certificate of her marriage, nothing. Mr. Gardner had made a clean sweep of all these documents, newspapers, and writings before leaving The Cottage and the beautiful woman who, for a time, had, even in his eyes, converted it into a paradise.

While travelling to London, these facts, in a dreamy uncertain way, had got into her mind, and she realized more or less her position. She was a unit in the world—a thing without a name, a homeless wanderer, belonging to nobody; and whether Heaven had given her a child in mockery, or out of love and mercy, she knew not; she only knew that she loved it with all her heart and soul, and that she would never part with it and live. As she sat staring at nothing in the parlor of No. 5, Porter's Buildings, she saw none of the indications of poverty about her. The tawdry fire-paper in the grate, covered with soot; the torn blind, yellow with dirt and age; the cracked cups and saucers that Molly Maloney placed upon the rickety table; the kettle she tried to boil over a lamp on the mantelshelf; the wanderer noted none of these things—her thoughts were far away, and in spite of her they were following in imagination the fortunes of Tristram Decker. She fancied she saw him in some far

distant corner of America, and it almost comforted her to feel that he was thinking of her. He was the only friend she had in the world; and she had seen him looking over the gate in the Vale of Essam.

At first that vision only impressed her with the belief that he was dead; for they were superstitious people in her southern home, and the old negress who nursed her as a child constantly saw ghosts and spirits. Since yesterday, however, her troubled mind had put out hands, as it were, to feel for something or somebody to cling to, and they had brought back the thought that perhaps Decker was coming to her; that the vision she had seen was the shadow of his coming, the warning sent on before. While she was regarding this possibility with child-like satisfaction, however, the woman's view of the situation intervened and made her shudder. What could she say to Tristram Decker? If he sought her, it would be with his heart full of love for her, full of tender memories. And even the declaration, "I am married," if it were not bitter enough, might be contradicted in his hearing, and he would look upon her as an outcast, a thing for scorn and contumely.

Irish Moll went on talking to her lodger, who made her no answer, but presently rose and staggered to the bed.

"Ah, that's right; it's rest ye want. Lie ye down and I'll make the tay for ye; and ye'll find that bed as soft as a lady's couch, that ye will."

The baby cried. Mrs. Gardner laid it upon the pillow, and, lying beside it, soothed it and stroked its head.

"I'll just go out now and buy ye the bit of supper this night, and something for the darlint's breakfast. Will ye be giving me a few shillings to make the purchases?"

"Give me a little water."

"Sure and the tay'll be ready in less than a minute."

"A little water."

Mrs. Maloney found some water after much searching. It was warm, but the fugitive drank it.

"Ah, thank the saints you're getting better. Did ye hear what I said about the supper and the few shillings?"

"Yes," she answered, taking the purse out of her pocket.

It was in Molly's hand the moment it appeared.

"I'll just take five shillin," darlint, that's all," she said, examining the purse at the lamp; "that's enough; sure five shillings will get you a mighty fine supper and breakfast."

She handed the purse back, and as she left the house impressed upon "the darlint" that she would return in a few minutes. But she came back no more. There were notes and gold in the wanderer's purse. Wicked eyes leered at the money: cruel fingers clutched it. Irish Moll was a professional thief, and something even worse. One of her favorite "lays," as they called the cruel business in Porter's Buildings, was to pick up men or women at the great railway stations, unfortunate girls flying from disgrace in rural districts, countrymen seeking lodgings—strangers, in fact, to London, for whom armies of plunderers, men and women, are continually on the watch. The favorite stations are Victoria, Charing Cross, and Waterloo; but Irish Moll varied her operations just as she varied her place of residence. She had only looked in upon Paddington as a speculation; it was not one of her haunts, and it offered less facilities than the other big stations for her kind of work. The railway police are active men at Paddington, though Mrs. Maloney managed to elude them on this her first important stroke of business in that locality.

Left alone, the mother hummed a lullaby to the child, and presently both slept where they lay. The shout of late revellers resounded in the court, and the shriek of women. But the Southern planter's daughter heard them not. Exhausted nature was recouping itself. The mother lay by her child, with her arms under its little head, as calm and still as if she were dead. Presently morning, dirty and grim, looked in upon them through the dusky window. The sun rarely deigned to cast even a solitary ray into the recesses of Porter's Buildings. The first light of day was bathing Essam in a poetic mist, a gray halo, cool and fresh; the hedges were decked with liquid diamonds, birds were singing on every tree; but morning at Porter's Buildings was a different thing altogether. It seemed to hang about as if it were indifferent, if not ashamed of the work it had to do; for it had to reveal to men's eyes the black spots in the world, the filth and degradation of life; to show the slimy depths to which human nature can fall. The first beams of morning never fell upon so sweet a picture of suffering innocence as that which they came upon at No. 5, Porter's Buildings. Sleep, like his brother Death, had smoothed all signs of care from the mother's face. There was even a smile upon the half

parted lips; the closed eyes spoke of peace and rest; and the little face beside them was rosy with health.

It was hard to wake them so rudely. But the woman who came in with the morning wanted to know, with many curses, what, in the name of Satan and other demons, she was doing in her bed, and in her room. The new lodger woke with a cry, and, clinging to her child, sat up and stared wildly about. The drunken owner of the bed said, "Oh, yes, that was all very fine, but what was she doing there?" Mrs. Gardner stammered something about an Irishwoman having brought her; whereupon the woman, who had come in with ribbons in her bonnet and silk upon her back, anathematized Irish Moll, and supposed she'd been at her little games again, and said, though she was her own mother, she'd suffer considerable torments if ever she should step inside that door again. Then she informed the "infernal interloper" and her "brat" that they'd better "get out quick." Whereupon the stranger, who had been brought to this land flowing with milk and honey by a misguided father, slipped out at the door into a grimy passage, then into a court reeking with foul odors, and finally out into a broad deserted street.

She attracted the attention of a policeman, for they were the only persons to be seen, though a crowd of sparrows were chattering and quarrelling over their breakfasts in the roadway.

The officer said it was a queer kind of time for a person to want an hotel. Where had she come from? What was she doing? Where did she live? He asked her many questions, and told her he had no idea where she could find a respectable hotel that would take her in. A baby and no luggage. Oh, she had left her luggage, she said, at the house where somebody had taken her for the night. The policeman said she should keep out of bad company. They had turned her out of the house, she said. What did she mean? Who had she been with? See didn't know; an Irishwoman. An Irishwoman, the policeman said, reflectively. Well, the best thing she could do was to go over to that early coffee-shop and get some coffee, and he would see if they would take her in at the hotel next door. He did not quite make out to his own satisfaction whether he was justified in helping her to this extent, but she looked something better that the sort of woman he thought her before he had spoken to her.

She sat down timidly in a corner of the coffee-house, where the last of the night's beetles was just crawling lazily away beneath the fender. The attendant, rubbing his eyes, brought her a cup of coffee. She took out her purse to pay for it. There was no money in it. The purse was empty. She felt in her pocket. The attendant said, "Oh, come, don't go and say you ain't got nothing." she said the woman had robbed her. What woman? She didn't know. She had forgotten her name. The old bewildered look came into her face. She looked at the empty purse; she looked at the man. The policeman returned. "Come along, mem," he said, "they'll take you in at the Dragon." "She ain't got no money," said the coffee-shop keeper. The officer thereupon commenced to ask her a new set of questions. She answered them more or less vaguely, but in the end he said she had better go to the station with him, and he would see what could be done.

And when the sun broke out over the Vale of Essam, bursting through the morning mists, like a god illuminating the world with his presence, Caroline Virginia Gardner, friendless and penniless, was walking by the side of a policeman, gazed at by scavengers and workmen who found business thus early in the Edgeware Road. Within forty-eight hours the innocent American beauty had been hurled from a luxurious home in a smiling pastoral valley into the depths of cruel London's most cruel slums, the hiding-places of Poverty and the dark haunts of Vice.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

ON BOTH SIDES OF THE CHANNEL.

If not the most luxuriant, it was the pleasantest little studio in St. John's Wood. A north light, and furnished with odd things of all kinds and colors, it was sufficiently in disorder to indicate a bachelor tenant, and not without equal evidence of a feminine hand here and there. The jars and vases, the picture-frames, the screens that seemed to lie carelessly about, were clean. The carpet had been brushed; there were pipes, spill-cases, cards, and cigar-holders upon the mantelshelf. These things were lying about in admired disorder, but there was no dust. An easy chair near the fireplace was adorned with a satin antimacassar. A Japanese rug covered the centre of the room. The usual lay figure of an artist's studio stood in a jaunty attitude, like an intoxicated barbarian, and wore a robe of Indian silk. A couch where a model had been reclining was placed in position, commanded by an easel, upon which was lying an open book. A vase of roses decorated a small cabinet close by, and there was something not only in this fact, but more still in the arrangement of the flowers, that betokened a woman's touch.

While we are contemplating this abode of art, there enters a tall, picturesque-looking young man, stalwart, broad of chest, his hair cut close to his head, his beard hanging in a silken mass upon his chest. He wears a suit of gray clothes, a white shirt, no waistcoat, his jacket flung back, and upon his feet a pair of thick, untanned shoes.

"Nonsense, my dear," he was saying as he entered the

studio,—"nonsense; you must shut out all the world when you cross the portals of the temple, and only think of me."

The interesting lady who followed the artist had a letter and a newspaper in her hand. Slight in figure, with bright hazel eyes, she had in her face an expression of care which was not unfamiliar to the reader in the early days of this history, when Emily Sleaford had charge of the domestic economy of the corner house in Fitzroy Square.

It was the first time that Fred Tavener had seen his wife really troubled since their marriage, which had taken place some six months prior to this summer morning when we meet Mr. Tavener for the first time. They had been united in a quiet, unostentatious way, though Mr. Sleaford had offered Emily an imposing ceremony and breakfast. Their honeymoon had been spent on a sketching tour in Derbyshire, and Frank had been enabled to rent the house where he had previously lodged, with its pretty little studio built off the dining-room into the garden at the back. They were very happy, having married for love, though not necessarily to live in a cottage, and think bread and cheese and kisses the best of fare. Indeed, Frank always said he would not ask Emily to marry him until he was making a clear five hundred pounds a year, and Emily had always as consistently replied that the day he said he was ready he might but up the banns. She was a determined little lady, as we have already seen, Miss Emily Sleaford, but she was "as good as gold"—and her idea of keeping up appearances was not to shape your life according to Mrs. Grundy, but according to the honorable laws of those moral ethics which are the outcome of honest hearts and well-balanced minds.

"This is my own particular and private preserve; I am monarch here," continued the artist, "and a happy face is essential to the completion of my picture, which is to increase our income this year up to a thousand pounds."

He put a powerful arm round the little figure, and kissed his wife upon the lips. She affected to rub her face afterwards, with the remark that she certainly would have him shaved; she might as well be hugged by a bear. Frank went to the mantelshelf, lighted a cigarette, opened a window that looked upon a lawn dotted with flowers, sat crosslegged upon a wooden chair, and contemplated his wife through a cloud of white smoke. She was a dainty picture, in an old-fashioned baby-dress, with long mittens upon her arms, and bows upon her shoulders. A frill at

the bottom of her skirt fell short of a pair of pretty ankles, and feet in silk stockings, and buckled shoes.

"You volunteered to sit, my love, and you must go through with it; I know fellows who make their wives models whether they will or no. I don't hold with that; but when your wife insists upon sending your professional sitter about her business, and takes her place, why, then there must be no shirking it."

"If anybody heard you, what a tyrant they would think you," said Emily, sitting down upon the sofa.

"I should think they would," he said, flinging the remainder of his cigarette into the garden, and closing the window. "I am going to finish this picture before the month is out, whatever happens, and then I'll show you the sort of tyrant I am. I'll drag you all over the Continent, through Switzerland, Italy, France—I don't know where."

He was preparing his palette while he talked: a blackbird was piping aloud on the top of a tree in the garden, and Mrs. Tavener was vainly trying to bring back to her face the expression which had begun to play about the eye, which Tavener had transferred to his canvas.

"When you are troubled, then is the time to lose yourself in occupation," said the artist.

"Yes; if you were sitting here, and I were drawing your picture, that would be a very different thing."

"A very indifferent one, I should say, judging from the attempt you made the other day," he replied.

"Frank, you are unkind."

"All my models say so."

"But really, dear, I don't think I can sit still this morning."

The artist laid his palette down, went up to his wife, sat by her side, and in a voice of assumed banter, said,—

"Did it get tired of its work, then? Would it be a model, and then want to give it up just when it was becoming useful? Did it pretend to be strong-minded, and break down over the first bit of trouble that overtakes its family? Well, then, it shall come for a nice little walk round the garden, and have a talk and see what's to be done."

The newspaper she held in her hand contained the paragraph which Mr. Maclosky Jones had read to Mrs. Gardner. It was stale news now, but some friend of Emily had sent her another copy, fearing she might not have seen it. The

letter was from mamma, who had gone to Boulogne with Jeremiah the Good to meet and commune with their son. It stated that to save Tom from a criminal prosecution his father would have to part with all their property, and that their only hope now was that he would be able to successfully renew his suit with Jane Crosby. Tom was very penitent, and for all their sakes it was better that they should become poor again, rather than suffer the stain upon their house of having a son sentenced to transportation. Jeremiah, she said, had behaved in the most magnanimous and paternal manner, having agreed to give up all he possessed, which, with the sale of Tom's property, would cover a portion of the defalcations, sufficient to have the whole matter settled. "But I fear, love," the letter continued, "your father can never again do business in the city, and that we must try and make up an income by letting Fitzroy Square furnished, and living in humble lodgings. Your father thinks if we could take a little farm somewhere near the Thames, and keep fowls and have a boathouse, we might get along, and that Mr. Tavener could come down and paint there, as he is so fond of Thames subjects."

Emily read this again to Fred as they walked round and round the garden, a square bit of well-cultivated ground, with creepers all over the walls, and a grass-plot with clumps of verbenas, geraniums, and fuchsias dotting it in small beds, that looked like splashes of gorgeous color upon a green ground.

"Yes, that's kind about the Thames," said Frank.

"And so practical, isn't it?" said Emily, with a regretful smile.

"Very! They'd get two or three hundred a year from Fitzroy Square, and spend six on the Thames."

"Just what I was thinking."

"But you ought to have married a rich man, Em, and then you could have stepped in and put it all right."

"Nothing would put them all right, Frank; poor father's fortunes, ever since I can remember, have always been going up and down like a bucket in a well, and with the lively uncertainty of never knowing when it would come up empty or full. I don't know what is to be done. Patty, however, is the greatest puzzle. Mamma complains bitterly of her, though I really cannot see that the girl is to be blamed. 'If I marry Mr. Roper,' she says, 'he shall have the ten thousand pounds; if I don't, it lies in the bank until

I marry somebody else, and in that case I give it to my husband; therefore it is impossible for me to help father with that money; and it is no use being unkind about it.'"

"Yes; I wouldn't have given Patty credit for so much firmness," said Tavener.

"She surprises me. I thought I knew her thoroughly; I don't. She offers no explanation; she will neither say Yes nor No to Roper, now that father has given his consent; she goes on painting her water-color sunsets, and nursing her foot at you when you sit down and talk to her; and I am quite beaten."

"That ten thousand pounds will accumulate and grow," replied Frank; "some day, if she does not marry, it will be a wonderful sum; it might, if kept long enough at interest, become big enough to pay off the National Debt. There's a nest egg for you!"

"What troubles me most is this proposed attack on Jane Crosby; there is something so humiliating and degrading in it that I have been thinking whether it is not my duty to write to Miss Crosby, or to see her and tell her everything. I know she does not dislike Tom; I fancy it is even possible she might marry him; and if she did she would be a wretched woman. What ought I to do?"

Frank Tavener stroked his beard, and drew his wife's arm under his own.

"You know as well as I do that Tom is a wicked, bad fellow."

"He is your brother, dear."

"He is none the less a scoundrel,—a heartless, designing, cruel man."

Mrs. Tavener quickened her steps, and a hot glow came upon her face.

"It is a bitter thing to say, and the sin of the business is heaviest when one looks at it from a sister's point of view. It may be selfish to say so, but think, Frank, what Patty and I lose in having for a brother a man like Tom, instead of a man we could be proud of. How delightful, for instance, if he could come and see us, and smoke a cigar with you; but, there, it does not bear thinking of: if he does not end his days in prison or upon the gallows, I suppose we ought to be content."

"I think I should do nothing until your father and mother come home," said Tavener; "perhaps things are not so bad as they seem."

"Your motto is always 'wait,' Frank," replied the wife.

"Yes, it's a good old motto. Didn't I wait for you, and are you not here with your arm in mine, and wouldn't I give you a kiss and hug you where you stand if that wretched Mother Sniggers was not watching us from her back window? She has been peeping behind her blind ever since we came out."

"I suppose I shall have to settle it for myself," said Mrs. Tavener; "you won't help me."

"I'm such an ass at family affairs, you know; ask my advice, dear, when you've made up your mind and then you'll see how I shall wake up."

"I shall caution Jane Crosby."

"Very well, show me the letter when you have written it; and now that burden is off your mind, come to work."

He put his arm round her in spite of Mother Sniggers. She leaned lovingly against his great, manly figure, and they re-entered the studio, which led Mother Sniggers to remark to herself that she didn't believe any two people that were really married would conduct themselves so disgracefully in the broad face of day.

While Fred Tavener was idealizing his wife on canvas, two of the persons of whom they had been talking were sitting by an hotel window, overlooking the sea at Boulogne, after an excellent French breakfast, one of them smoking a cigar, both of them drinking claret. Mrs. Sleaford had gone out to do a little shopping. They were occupying a handsome suite of rooms, and were to be seen in an evening among the happiest-looking people at the *Etablissement*, where Tom played billiards, and Mr. Sleaford wandered in and out of the dancing and reading saloons, and otherwise conducted themselves like wealthy English people taking their ease. To protect them from the sun, which was flashing over the sea and making the city dazzling in its white beauty, an outer blind was carefully drawn. Tom Sleaford was sitting upon one chair, with his legs on another. His father was walking up and down the room. Although they had been together for some days in Boulogne, they had evidently not forgiven each other, nor had they altogether made up their differences. Jeremiah the Politic, with his hands beneath his coat tails, was walking solemnly to and fro, his bald head shining with the dew of summer heat, his cravat neatly tied, his bushy whiskers bushier than

ever, and his eyeglass dangling by a broad band of black ribbon, that made a long line across his white shirt front.

"It's no good crying over spilt milk," said Tom, contemplating his slippered feet, and smoking in a calm, deliberative way that irritated his father almost to madness, "have another glass of claret and sit down, governor."

"Spilt milk! If it had been honestly spilt," cried Jeremiah, "if the Cow of Fortune had lifted her leg and tilted it over, as she has done many a full bucket before now, then I could have borne it; but to see my own son take the milk, not to say the cream, of a city career and literally throw it down the gutter, it is wicked, it is slapping Fortune in the face, and snapping your fingers at Fate."

Jeremiah liked metaphors. He caught up the idea of spilt milk with avidity. He carried it up and down the room. He flung it at Tom. He launched it at the ceiling. He shook it like a flag. He dashed it upon the table He stabbed the air with it. Finally he sighed, and drank a glass of claret.

"Spilt milk! Only to think what the phrase means. Gold, independence, luxury, a dignified mind, happy old age—everything that makes life worth having—presented by Fortune to parched lips, and wilfully hurled to the ground; maliciously poured into the earth, to be swallowed up by a fleeting palace in a valley, an *alias*, a *nom de plume*, and an immoral life. Tom, you will never know how all this has cut me to the quick, bowed me down, and humbled your mother and sister, who looked up to you.

"Down, governor, down," said Tom, interrupting his father.

"What do you mean?"

"Looked down upon me," repeated the son.

"I say up to you, Tom, and I am right."

"You always are, governor."

"No, sir, not always; I am sometimes wrong, very wrong. I ought to have insisted upon looking into your affairs long ago."

"We have done those things we ought not to have done, and left undone those things we ought to have done, and for which we have got it hot," said the profane spendthrift.

"Yes; you do well to sneer at religion, at morality—at everything the human heart holds good and pure and noble," said Mr. Sleaford, raising his eyes to the ceiling with an air of piety and virtue.

"If you were a model father talking to me like that, governor,—if I believed you believed what you are saying, it might have some effect on me, but—"

"'Honor thy father and thy mother,'" broke in Mr. Sleaford, "'that thy days may be long in the land.'"

There was something almost pathetic in the old man's delivery of the solemn commandment.

"It doesn't say whether thy father is good or bad,—the divine law makes no qualification; and so sure as you live, you will suffer for disobeying it. 'Honor thy father and thy mother!' To the Allseeing eye it is enough that they are thy father and thy mother; they are to be honored, and the son who slightingly disregards it may not cry over spilt milk, but his day of sorrow and misery is fixed as the stars, and his time will come."

The father stood before the son, who simply moved his position, pushing one chair a little further off and lighting a fresh cigar.

"Do you hear what I say?"

"Rather."

"It makes no impression, then?"

"Yes; capitally delivered. You might have a career in the Church, or in Parliament, if you were not too old. I don't know which is best, your action or your eloquence."

Jeremiah rarely got into a passion, but the cool effrontery of Tom Sleaford would have raised the pulse of the meekest father in Christendom.

"Look you, Tom!" shouted Sleaford; "if you don't get up and treat what I say with at least a show of respect, I'll dash this decanter in your face. Get up, you scamp, get up!"

Once moved, the old man grew reckless. He seized Tom by the collar, and dragged him out of his chair. It was the first time he had ever laid a hand upon his son in anger.

"Hollo, governor, what the devil are you doing? Are you going off your chump?" exclaimed Tom, shaking himself together.

"You swindling thief!" shrieked the father, "how dare you sit there and sneer at me? You mean miserable scoundrel!"

"Go it," said Tom, retreating a few paces from the angry man.

"I brought you up, educated you, slaved for you, lied

for you—aye, and worse," he went on, thinking of his trick with the Martin will. "There is hardly a crime I wouldn't have committed for you; and you reward me with sneers, taunts, affronts, damned, conceited, thieving puppy!"

The old man trembled with passion. Tom was silent. He laid down his cigar, and looked at his father without any attempt to conceal his astonishment.

"Yes, thieving puppy, I said. Those were my words. I disown you! You are no son of mine. You are a base, ungrateful scamp. I could find it in my heart to brain you."

He took up the decanter and flung it down, in his rage, smashing it into a thousand pieces, and then rushed out of the room. A waiter hurried in as Mr. Sleaford went out, and asked if monsieur rung. Tom said no, and requested the waiter not to show his ugly face there again until he did ring. The servant bowed, and retired. Tom relighted his cigar, and walked about the room with a quiet, steady, contemplative stride. It was something quite new for Mr. Sleaford to lash himself into a passion. But Tom had goaded him, and the young man began now to wonder that his father had stood his taunts and sneers so long. Tom was one of those born cowards who harass the weak and take liberties with those who give way to them. To submit was in Tom's view an invitation to aggression. He had not a spark of chivalry in his nature. The more Fitzroy Square had given way to him in the old days, the more he had domineered over it. As his father consented to be sneered at, Tom sneered at him; and the fact that he knew his father hadn't clean hands in regard to finance and speculation was not temporized by filial considerations. He would not make the sacrifices for his father which his father would make for him. His father was a rogue, and he was not willing to be lectured for being one himself by a confederate, for he insisted upon regarding his father in that light, though he had himself been engaged in dishonest transactions of which his father had not the slightest knowledge.

"I won't have him talking like that to me," he said presently to his mother, who came to him in tears.

"But he is your father, and in trouble," said Mrs. Sleaford, laying down a lovely specimen of terra-cotta work which she had just purchased and carried home, to be followed by other parcels of ornamental goods which she thought Patty would like, and which would look "so nice"

in the drawing-room at home, even if they were ultimately obliged to let the house.

"If he were my father twenty times over I wouldn't stand it," said Tom. "If I am in a hole, whose fault is it? Am I not his son, and am I not following in his footsteps?"

"No, Tom, you are not," said Mrs. Sleaford, with more emphasis than was customary with her; "and if you could see your poor father at this moment bathing his dear head with eau-de-Cologne, and sobbing, you wouldn't have the heart to say so."

"He wants his head bathing with something. He must be going mad! Look at that decanter, smashed all to pieces. Supposing it had hit me in the face!"

Tom kicked the glass about, and Mrs. Sleaford looked at it a little terror-stricken.

"He's very sorry that he let his temper get the better of him, I'm sure," said Mrs. Sleaford, "but you shouldn't say that you are following in his footsteps."

"I say I am. He let me into the secrets of financing and finessing, and I am a worthy pupil."

"Oh, how can you say so, Tom! Whatever your father may be, he has been a true and constant husband."

"Has he?"

"Yes, he has, Tom. He never kept a den of infamy and had an *alias*—there!"

Mrs. Sleaford felt herself grow quite cold.

"Oh, I've kept a den of infamy, have I?"

"I will say, if I am killed for it the next minute, that your father was always a faithful husband, and never tired of scheming for his family."

The good lady rose, and, stamping her foot gently on the floor, she screamed in broken falsetto tones,—

"If I were your father, and strong, I would show you whether you should disgrace the family and then insult us! There! I have taken your part till now; but to see that dear man sobbing and bathing his head, it would make the heart of a worm turn. Oh, you unfeeling, cruel son! Oh, you wicked, disgusting, young man, with your harems and your creatures! I declare my heart is breaking with it all!"

Mrs. Sleaford felt as if she were suffocating. She staggered and fell upon a couch. Tom dashed water in her face, and poured brandy into her mouth.

"Here's a nice go!" said the affectionate son. "I shall cut this altogether. Here, mother, don't be absurd."

She did not move. He lifted her up in his arms and laid her upon the floor, near the window, and opened the door, so as to produce a current of air. Presently she recovered. As soon as she did, Tom rang the bell, told the waiter to go and tell Mr. Sleaford that Mrs. Sleaford wanted him; and then, saying he would go and take a stroll until the storm had blown over, he left the room and went out to play billiards at the *Etablissement.*

CHAPTER II.

"THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT."

A DISHEVELLED and miserable-looking couple, the Sleafords, father and mother, sat upon the French sofa and vainly tried to comfort each other. Mrs. Sleaford laid her faded curls upon Jeremiah's shoulder, and he put his arms affectionately about her. It was many and many a long year since they had sat in so loving an attitude. The tears still stood in Jeremiah's eyes. He didn't speak for some time. He could see the loungers on the beach, he could hear the merry laugh of young people bathing, he saw white-sailed craft dancing upon the incoming tide; it all looked so gay and happy outside that the scene only intensified his feeling of sorrow and misery.

"I have deserved it," he said, presently. "I have deserved his taunts and his sneers."

"To live to gray hairs and hear you say so! Don't Jerry don't."

"To live to gray hairs and find your entire family against you, Mrs. Sleaford, that is the hardest cut of all; we haven't a dutiful child, to say nothing of a loving and affectionate one."

"Patty is only wilful, my dear. She is good, I'm sure. Don't let us, in our sorrow, do her an injustice. Ah, Jeremiah, we have lived long enough, I think,—too long, perhaps."

Jeremiah sighed, and whisked a fly away that persisted upon biting his hand.

"If Tom had earned the right to speak as he has done to-day, that would have been another matter; but a young man who has been living a life of secret debauchery and open dishonesty, and who comes to us a bankrupt, and really charged with being a swindler, it is too much—too much!"

"It is indeed! It is very cruel!"

"I introduced him into finance, it's true, and a man who makes his way among Jackals has to do dirty work. Mining itself is not clean—even gold ore dirties the hands, and you have to fight with the weapons other people fight with in the city; and if he combines debauchery with it, and the manufacture of illegal scrip, is that my fault?"

Jeremiah's mixed metaphors rather impressed Mrs. Sleaford with the truth of his remarks, and she was glad that he no longer accused himself; though the next moment he disappointed her by grovelling metaphorically at Tom's feet.

"But that is easily said," he continued, with a sigh "my dear Beatrice Maud."

"Ah, it is some consolation to hear you call me by that name, Jerry dear."

"I am not myself, love, to-day," he replied, as if he struggled against an exhibition of weakness. "If I were a Roman Catholic—which I am not, thank goodness, and I will never desert the Protestant faith, for which our fathers fought and bled, but I can now understand the use of the Confessional—if I were a Romanist, I would seek the nearest priest and confess."

"Open your heart to Beatrice Maud," said the faded neutral lady, whose head now almost pressed his cheek.

"Don't be foolish, Mrs. Sleaford, my love; let us consider our time of life: it behoves us to be dignified, even in our grief. I am not a good man, love; no, I am not; I'm a time-server, and some of my business transactions won't bear investigation. As I said before, I deserve the abuse of my son; I don't deserve the respect of my children, and I have not been always kind to you."

"I wouldn't say so; on the contrary, dear."

"You are of a patient disposition, love; you were made to bend before the storm; but let us hope we may cultivate mutual love in our old age, and in the retirement of a little

house on the Thames, away from the excitement and allurements of London. I am a beaten man, Maudy, dear, a beaten, broken man; but it is hard, in the days of our grayness and our sorrow, not to have the sympathy of our children."

"Emily sympathizes."

"Yes, that's true; she opposed us in our schemes for her. If she had married a rich husband things might have been different, because she is clever and would have managed him. But we must not altogether despair. I have heard that some of these painters make even very large incomes, and I saw a paragraph the other day which spoke very highly of Tavener's work. It was a happy thought of yours, love, the little place on the Thames; Emmy would keep it going in the summer, no doubt, for Tavener is fond of landscape backings for his figure subjects, they say. He likes to have his people in boats fishing or making love with swans about. That picture which Kerman gave you is worth a lot of money now, and I think you would be allowed to sell it; the trustees could manage that for you."

"Yes, dear; it would help us to furnish the farm, and might be turned into chickens and things."

"Practical as you are fond, my love; with such a dear wife I ought not to repine. I will not; I will cheer up, dear; we will both cheer up."

"Yes, dear, we will."

They did. They cheered up over a bottle of champagne. They cheered up over a little joint. They went out and cheered up on the beach. They cheered up in a little sailing-boat round the pier. They cheered up in the sun. They cheered up over imaginary pictures of a retired life near Cookham, with a boat and an awning over it, a tow-line, and a punt for fishing. They cheered up with calculations of the ease with which a really pleasant house on the river could be kept up. A cow or two, to give them milk and butter; plenty of fowls to supply them with eggs; corn to make their bread, and mint in the garden ready for the earliest lamb. Jeremiah said he didn't care if he never went into the city again. The Stock Exchange was an unnatural mother; it had behaved brutally to him. He had respected all its traditions, and had both bulled and beared with fearlessness and daring. If he had taken trifling advantages of the weakness of some of its laws, he had only done what others did and would do to the end of the

chapter. Let him get clear of his liabilities this once, and no more city for him. Ambition was over for him, since his children no longer sympathized with his labors. What was gold to him? His wants were few. His wife was a thoughtful, economical woman. Did he go to the city every day because he liked it? Was Mr. Maclosky Jones the sort of man he would select for a boon companion except in the way of business? Did Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson appeal to his sentiments of recitude on the subject of the position which woman should hold in the world?

It was a delightful relief for Jeremiah to sit in the stern sheets of the little boat, gliding away before the gentle southern breeze, and talk frankly of the past and the future.

City men, after all, were not his sort. He ought to have gone to the Bar, or devoted himself to literature.

"We all make mistakes," Jeremiah continued, with a sigh, "all of us, however thoughtfully we may consider our course in life at the outset."

He was too sanguine and too trustful for the city. Men deceived him. He believed in their facts and figures too easily. His nature, though he didn't want to boast, was naturally confiding and honest; and that was no good in the city. At the Bar, dealing with the affairs of other people, his only desire would, of course, have been to serve his clients. That would have suited his constitutional liberality. Now, in the city, self is your first consideration, and that was the secret of his failure as a financier. Yes, he had failed; he was ready to admit it. No, he would be frank now. He was not a success as a city man, financier, banker, or promoter. He had simply mistaken his avocation. It was a sad thing when a young man took the wrong turning in life. But how were you always to know? You stood at the commencement of four branching roads —law, literature, art, commerce. You take Law, as he did. Well, that might have been well and properly followed; but, as you advanced, you came to another turning—a beautiful, flowery-looking highway, with luxuriant hedges, rosy fruits, a soft, carpet-like flooring.

"To the City, Finance and Fortune; To the Gold Mines. You leave the uninteresting path of the law, and take the new turning and what do you find at the end?"

"A quiet little farm on the Thames," said Mrs. Sleaford, for Jeremiah paused as if he desired her to reply.

"Exactly; you have every right to expect a palace, with

carriages and horses and plenty of money; you find a cottage and a river, a cow or two, and some poultry. Very well said, my love; that was a bright thought of yours. A cottage for a palace is hardly what we had a right to expect; but if we can induce the angel Content to dwell with us, and have Tavener and our dear Emily down in the summer, we may even yet go gently to our last retiring place, hand in hand, though our only son strives to bring our gray hairs with sorrow to the grave."

"Don't think of him any more to-day, dear: perhaps he will be penitent; and if he should marry Jane Crosby, I'm sure you would enjoy an occasional visit to your native county."

"True, Beatrice Maud, true; trouble and poverty seem to enlarge your views: some poet has said that genius is the brighter, like stars on a frosty night, for being pinched a little; you bear out the simile, dear. If Tom asks my forgiveness, and Jane Crosby should accept him, I will not stand in the way of the Sleafords being once more a united family."

"Miss Crosby is proud," said Mrs. Sleaford, gathering courage to talk under the influence of Jeremiah's compliments: "she may not like to marry a bankrupt."

"My dear, Tom is not a bankrupt; his bankruptcy was duly annulled yesterday; the recovery of his estate on the Avon, and the transfer of all his shares in Asphaltes and in the Shipbuild-ing Company, enabled my own solicitor to arrange that for him."

"But there was something else," remarked Mrs. Sleaford, timidly.

"The illegal scrip; as we are alone on the ocean, with sailors who do not understand the English language, I need not be particular, I may call a spade a spade. He forged £25,000 worth of Roughened Asphaltic scrip. My solicitor insisted upon merely calling it an over-issue at the directors' meeting, and he induced the Financial Society, which had been extended in numbers and operations, to give it up in return for the whole of my new shares in the Omaha Silver Company. I transferred them; and when my remaining assets are realized to pay the calls on Cemeteries, my Stock Exchange differences, and other things, I shall not have a penny. I am cleaned out; and what is worse, I am no longer a member of the Stock Exchange, nor can I any more do business in Threadneedle Street. However, I need not

go into that, love ; I am a failure as a City man, and ambition is over for me."

"Miss Crosby might see that paragraph in the papers ?"

"She wouldn't understand it if she did, and it only appeared in one journal, It was very good of Roper to get a compliment to me added to the tail of it: that was all he could do when he found they would not withdraw the paragraph altogether. Considering the danger we have had to engineer through, we have reason to congratulate ourselves; we have even got through better than a cat through a skylight, to use Emily's favorite phrase. And Tom, instead of being grateful to me, treats me like a menial, a person to be despised—his own father! If they had prosecuted him he would have been transported for life ; and now, instead of playing billiards and smoking cigars in a French saloon, with the sea rolling up to its very windows, he might have been breaking stones with chains on his legs."

"Don't love, don't; it is too dreadful! I don't think he is amusing himself, love; I feel sure he is very miserable, waiting for us to return and make it all up."

But Jeremiah knew his son Tom better than his mother did, or affected to do. He had spotted his very occupation. Tom was astonishing a crack French player at the Frenchman's own game, and on his own table. When Tom arranged to meet his father and mother at Boulogne, it was not from any idea that the French seaport could any longer give immunity to him from debt or fraud. He was actuated by a desire for the time being to put the sea between himself and the woman he had deceived, and to try his hand at French billiards. He remembered his triumphs during a short tour in France, and he had been enabled to keep up his practice both in French and English billiards at The Cottage, where he had a billiard-room containing both kinds of tables. He had taught Caroline billiards, and had played many a game with her during his weekly visits to their picturesque home. When the last remnant of his conscience upbraided him for his treatment of the Southern planter's daughter, he soothed it by the reflection that he had divided his last bit of ready money with her. He had a thousand pounds; he gave her half of it. How bitterly he would have regretted this act of generosity, if he had known that she left it on the floor where it had fallen from his cruel letter; and that Migswood, after laying it down upon the dressing-

table, and contemplating it there for some time, had resolved to consider the money as a gift of fortune, in return for all she had suffered in and out of gaol. It was quite an hour before she made up her mind to put it in her pocket and devote it to her own use. She weighed the chances of detection and punishment. It might be "a lifer" if she was found out. She could swear the missus gave it to her. She knew the missus had purposely not touched it, that the broken-hearted woman despised it: she knew and wondered at that. Then she had reviewed her prospects. Once more out of a place, once more cast on the world, and not a soul to appeal to, nobody to employ her at Essam, for she was a gaol bird, and the horror of the board of guardians who had to keep her children, Migswood decided to run the risk of detection and imprisonment; and Caroline Denton had gone into the world with her own ten £10 notes, the balance, with a few sovereigns, of the only money left by her father. How she had been robbed of this we have already seen. The conclusion of the incident fell under Tom Sleaford's eyes, when, after pocketing his winnings at billiards, he sat down to smoke a quiet cigar and read the London papers.

"MARYLEBONE POLICE COURT.

"THE NIGHT SIDE OF LONDON.—A too well-known disreputable woman, rejoicing in the cognomen of "Irish Moll," was charged with stealing ten £10 notes, and £3 10s. in gold and silver, from the person of Caroline Gardner, a married woman, who said she was an American, and whose appearance in court excited commiseration on account of her prepossessing manners and her evident mental suffering. She said that she had come to London from the country, and that the prisoner at the depot (she called the railway station a depot, and could not be prevailed upon to say from what part of the country she came) had pressed her to lodge at her house, and, being a stranger and very tired, she had gone with her; that she gave her her purse, containing the above sum, to make purchases at a 'grocery store,' and that when she wanted some money afterwards the purse was empty. 'Irish Moll' called upon all the saints to testify that, beyond taking three shillings for the food she was going to buy, she had not touched a blessed farthing. It appeared, however, that Mrs. Maloney, to give the

woman her own title, went out under the pretense of returning to give the lodger her supper; that she never returned; and that the room, in the notorious region of Porter's Buildings, was not her own, but the apartments of her daughter, known as 'Tipperary Kate,' who had returned home drunk, and turned the prosecutor (who had a baby in her arms) out of the house. 'Tipperary Kate,' dressed in the height of Porter's Buildings' fashion, vowed (in spite of the magistrate's repeated request for silence) that she was as innocent as the babe unborn of going home drunk, not a drop having passed her lips for a week; and was it for her to know the respectability of the lady who was enjoying her 'ospitality unknown to her? The magistrate tried to induce Mrs. Gardner to explain how it was she came to be friendless and alone in London, but the prepossessing though mentally-suffering young person only said she wished to be allowed to go. In reply to the question whether she had any money, she said 'No.' The magistrate said he should insist upon her being taken to the Union until the authorities could make inquiries about her and help her. Whereupon the benevolent Miss Weaver came forward and volunteered to take charge of the young woman and her child until such time as inquiries could be instituted concerning her. Miss Weaver went over to the friendless but interesting young woman, and talked to her in her benevolent way; and the prosecutor eventually left the court with her, the magistrate ordering Miss Weaver to receive ten pounds from the poor-box. 'Irish Moll' was committed for trial. Detective Buncher, who had the case in hand, said the prisoner could easily convert the notes. Unfortunately, there were too many receivers in London to leave her any difficulty in this direction. She had in her possession, when taken, £14. The detective said it was quite possible the thieves' bankers, who had converted the notes for her, had not given her more than £15 for them. The magistrate said he was glad to be able to inform Mr. Smithers, who had come to watch this case for the Female Protection Society, that he had, during the course of this morning's business, committed two well-known receivers for trial."

Tom read the paragraph twice over. It would even outrage his bit of humanity to say that he did not feel sorry for Miss Weaver's two new objects of charity. His prevailing emotion, however, was one of fear. He had quite counted upon Caroline going back to America. Latterly

she had spoken scornfully of England and of English people. With five hundred pounds she could have no excuse for bringing him into disgrace. Besides, Migswood had told him that she had a lover in America; she had heard her talk of him; she had more than once spoken of him when she was talking to herself, as was her constant habit. Migswood had forced herself somewhat into his confidence, having seen such varied service at The Cottage, and being in a position at any time to make startling revelations to the latest Mrs. Gardner. Caroline in London, however, was a new trouble, inasmuch as his comfortable return thither, after the settlement of his affairs, formed part of his schemes for the future. Sometimes he had thought her a little mad, and the police report almost contained a suggestion of insanity. It was some satisfaction to see that she had declined to say what part of the country she came from. What a report there might have been in the papers if she had spoken of The Cottage! He wondered, as he smoked, whether it would be a good idea to go to Miss Weaver and 'square,' her: he had no doubt he could. Or whether it would not be better for him to "cut England" altogether. He knew a fellow who had been obliged to go to Spain, and who was doing very well there, having learned the language sufficiently well in twelve months to make a business as a broker and importer of English specialties. On the whole, he came to the conclusion that it would be best to see Miss Weaver. If there was any truth in the scandalous reports that were circulated about that charitable person's benevolent operations, he would not find it difficult to neutralize any action on the part of Caroline against him. The missing five hundred pounds also troubled him. No mention was made of that in the police report. Was it possible that Jones and Robinson had cheated her out of it? Quite. He upbraided himself for trusting them. They were equal to the vallany of abstracting the money from his sealed envelope. If that were so, he would recover it. If it were for nothing else, it was worth while calling on Miss Weaver. In the meantime he would write to Jane Crosby, asking her if any of his friends said anything to her calculated to discredit him in her good opinion, not to believe it until she had heard his version of the story. It had occurred to him that Jabez Thompson, who somehow knew everything, might be on his track.

"Some person published a malicious statement about

me; you said we could be friends if no closer relationship might exist, and I rely upon your kindly regard, at all events. It is true I have had serious losses, and that I must start in the world afresh. Many an older man than I, and many a better, has been commercially and financially unfortunate. I am conscious of no dishonor, and I begin the world to-day with a light heart."

Pausing to think what else he should say, he remarked to himself, "It's true enough, my first day's business, since my unlooked-for and undeserved misfortunes, yields me a thousand francs, and I never played French billiards better in my life."

He went on with the letter,—

"May I hope to be allowed to come and shoot on the first? I know you always have a pleasant little party. If Mr. Jabez Tompson objects to me, ask him to give me a chance of justifying myself in his eyes. I know he hates me, but I assure you it is not my fault. He has formed quite an erroneous opinion of me, and, above all that, it makes me feel very unhappy to think that I am in danger of growing out of your good opinion; and I claim the fulfilment of your word on that night when I disclosed my heart's best hopes to you, that we should always be friends."

Leaning back in his chair and lighting a fresh cigar, he said,—

"I think that will fetch her. I should like to lick Mr. Thompson, he's such a sly old fox."

Having sealed up the letter, he walked to the Post-office, and dropped it into the box, and then strolled into the hotel to dinner.

"Madame and monsieur will prefer to dine at *ze table d'hote* to-day," said the landlord.

"That will suit me, too," said Tom.

"They can't bully me there," he thought; "and I'll do the amiable to-night. I was rather stiff on the old man this morning I expect. By Jove! I never saw him in a real passion before; and madame—*ma mere*—she let me have it, too. Ah, well. it's all in a lifetime, it doesn't matter; a very small bit of soft solder will settle them both."

He went to his room and dressed. He always dressed for dinner. It was not only an inexpensive luxury, but it was highly respectable. A man who every day dresses for dinner under all circumstances shows that he has been accustomed to good society. Moreover, Tom Sleaford always

said that a "fellow feels more fit" in his dress clothes, especially for billiards. So he dressed for *table d'hote*, and entered the room with his mother on his arm, looking quite distinguished and wealthy. They "made it up" over dinner. Tom was studiously polite to his father, and deferentially attentive to his mother. He held a conversation in French with a neighbor, and shed quite a halo of fashion about the Sleaford party. Over coffee, in their sitting-room Tom apologized to his father, and was ostentatiously forgiven; and when he came in early from the billiard-room to have a chat before going to bed, Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford unfolded unto his son a new idea he had for a Discount and Banking Company, which could easily be started with 10,000*l*., and, retained exclusively in their own hands, could be worked most successfully.

"Unity is strength, Tom," said Jeremiah, passing his hand over his white and open forehead. "We have never worked for our own hands: be true to your father, Tom; listen to his advice, and with our united experience, and my knowledge of society, our efforts, honestly directed, Tom,—no more mistakes, no more tricks, honest administration in future,—and something tells me that 'The West End Bank of Discount and Deposit' might be worked into a great and thriving institution."

"But what about the little place on the Thames?" Tom asked; "final retirement from the city?"

"I adhere to both, Tom; I never go from my word. Your mother shall let the corner house in Fitzroy Square; we will take the little house on the Thames, and an office in some West End thoroughfare. I would come to town three or four days a week; you would be there every day; and in the summer your mother and Patty couldn't be dull, because there would be Tavener painting his Thames backgrounds, and Emily rowing her mother on the river; and with energy and honesty, and judicious advertising, I have not a doubt that 'The West End Bank of Discount and Deposit' would prove to us the truth of the axiom, which I always think so comforting, that 'everything happens for the best.'"

"All right, governor, there's no harm in thinking it over and discussing it. When do you propose to go to town?"

"To-morrow," said Mr. Sleaford, with a cheerful glance at his face in the mirror over the mantelshelf,—"to-morrow, Tom; and we'll sketch out a prospectus ere we go. If a

few ornamental names are wanted, I can get them. A couple of clergymen on the direction would be useful; and we might have a touch of philanthropy in it."

"Yes; benevolence is a good bait, and it pays, too," said Tom, stretching his legs out in the attitude which had been so offensive to his father only a few hours previously.

"In these days," said Jeremiah the Enterprising and Benevolent, as if rehearsing a portion of the prospectus, "when the humblest tradesman is compelled to buy for ready money in order to hold his own against Co-operative Stores, —when small manufacturers find the necessity of financial assistance for the completion of contracts,—when even the working man is compelled to pawn his furniture to meet the increasing demands of necessary creditors,—the promoters have come to the conclusion that they can legitimately help the needy though honest toiler without the desire or the necessity of making a profit on that class of business; contented, while dealing with larger and more extended transactions, to stoop, on philanthropical grounds, to the aid of their humbler fellow-creatures; conscious, while doing so, they are helping, if indirectly, to advance the interests of the nation at large, and thereby, even from a business point of view, promoting the increase of commercial, banking, and financial transactions. Upon this industrial class of business the directors have entered into an agreement under no circumstances to charge a higher rate of interest than five per cent per annum!"

"Capital!" exclaimed Tom, "worthy of your old self governor; I congratulate you on the return of your business activity. A capital idea! I shall say good-night, now: I want to get up early."

"Good-night, Tom," said the gentleman who had given up finance for ever. "Glad you like the scheme. Your mother's fast asleep by this time; I shall sit up for an hour and make a rough draft of the prospectus, so that we can talk it out with data before us to-morrow. Eh?"

"All right, sir! Good-night!"

Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford sat far into the night inventing his new scheme of banking and finance; and in the interest of provident and successful toilers in the humbler middle class of life, who sought in vain for a profitable and safe investment of their savings, he fashioned a scheme of deposit which should bear a secured interest of twenty per cent. It was quite a delightful discovery to Mr. Sleaford,

this idea of the customers of a bank sharing in the profits of its business. "The established institutions of the day," wrote the new Apostle of Banking, "pay a small and insignificant interest on deposits, and, using the money, make for themselves and their shareholders from ten to even forty and fifty per cent. The West End Bank of Discount and Deposit will accept deposits for three, six, and twelve months, and pay an interest on the same at the rate of twenty per cent, with bonuses from time to time out of the profits made beyond that amount, thus giving to its customers the full benefit of its successful enterprise, the experience of its manager, and the unique advantages which it possesses for the profitable application and use of money."

It was daylight when he went to bed; and it seemed to him, also, as if the morning of his best hopes were also breaking bright and promising after the clouds of a stormy night. Hope was constant in the Sleaford breast. Dimmed for a moment by misfortune, it only shone the brighter upon the darker background. For Jeremiah Sleaford, as he laid his head by the side of Beatrice Maud's nightcap, the New Bank was as good as in existence. If for the time being he seemed untrue to his faith in mines, he came back to it in his sleep. He dreamed that he was sole possessor of a gold region which was bringing him in a thousand a day. Jeremiah was very happy in his sleep.

CHAPTER III.

MISS WEAVER'S RETREAT.

THE enemies of Miss Weaver said she was an impostor.

It seemed a singular freak of calumny to point the finger of scorn at so charitable and so beautiful a woman as the lady of "The Retreat." "Carriages and horses and plenty of money,' to quote a Sleafordism, would surely not be engaged in the practical work of charity as a trade. Miss Weaver's friends hardly considered the charge worthy of an answer. Perhaps the persistent, silent contempt which the founder of "The Retreat" meted out to envious detractors and libellers rather encouraged than deterred vicious criticism. Miss

Weaver would remark, in her patient, self-denying way, that while her works were her only answers to slander, the armor of a good conscience protected her from the personal suffering which envious shafts might otherwise inflict. If she had any feeling in the matter, it was one of regret that her supporters should have to endure some of the odium of attacks levelled at her only. She had her own theory about the libels, and she might some day explain it, but not yet. Major Wenn knew that her family were much opposed to what they called the sacrifice of her life and prospects for creatures who should be left to wallow in the gutter. But she had put her hand to the plough, and she would go on.

Miss Weaver's most active enemies found a malicious delight in saying that she was never known to take a girl or woman into her "Retreat" without being sure that the action would be well advertised. They said it was a point with her to take up a case in the presence of the public. She haunted police-courts, so that when a magistrate found himself in a difficulty with a female prisoner—too helpless to be cast back upon the world, not bad enough to be sent to prison—Miss Weaver would step in and, with a modest deference to the bench, suggest that she thought the case was peculiarly one for "The Retreat." Or, in the event of an interesting young woman coming to grief through the misconduct of some perfidious man, or when the Society for the Protection of Woman had stepped between some foreign girl and a designing procuress, Miss Weaver continually came to the front to relieve Justice from a quandary, and to exercise the practical benevolence of her well-known institution, to which she had sacrificed fortune, health, almost reputation.

It was Miss Weaver's mission in life to help her unfortunate sisters. When her widowed mother turned her adrift, at the age of seventeen, to seek a precarious living as a ladies' maid, she conceived the idea of devoting her life and fortune, one pound and five shillings, to the salvation of deluded girls and unfortunate women. She commenced as a distributer of tracts; and she rose step by step until she became secretary to a society for advancing the interests of domestic servants out of employment. A clergyman, who was evidently actuated by spitefulness and jealousy, professed to be dissatisfied with the way in which Miss Weaver kept her accounts. Indeed, he was so malicious that, as

the chairman of the society, he called upon her to resign, under a cruel threat of charging her with theft. Anxious to avoid scandal, and unwilling to injure a most wicked parson, because he had a wife and a large family, she resigned, even enduring the suspicions of the committee. Their minds had been poisoned by the chairman, who, though he deserved her anathemas, she declared her intention to pray for, every day.

There is no knowing how much a truly charitable heart will bear for the welfare of persons with whom it has not the slightest sympathy, of whom it has indeed no knowledge, when the guiding spirit is one of truly Christian benevolence. Miss Weaver, after her great act of self-sacrifice in connection with the Domestic Servants' Aid Society, found herself the possessor of one hundred and fifty pounds. With a liberality that even touched the heart of the Bishop of Took's Court, she opened an establishment for the purpose of supplying poor women, mothers of families, nurses, and respectable domestic servants, with winter clothing and bedding at cost price. The institution was managed by a committee, which included several gentlemen well known for their philanthropical proclivities. Major Wenn was the secretary and treasurer; Miss Weaver, the manageress. The committee sat once a quarter to receive the report, and to pass resolutions favorable to Miss Weaver and Major Wenn; eventually the society got into financial difficulties, the bishop retired from the committee, and certain creditors, finding that everything had been bought and sold in Miss Weaver's name, insisted upon making the lady bankrupt. Such is the cold, unappreciative conduct of creditors who are not philanthropists! The Court found that the books of accounts were badly kept, and that considerable sums of money were unaccounted for. Miss Weaver, however, appeared before the Commissioner herself, and made a statement which put a different complexion upon the case from that which at first it seemed to bear. A crowd of poor women, whom she had helped in sore need, appeared, several of them in tears, and Miss Weaver received protection and a certificate with sympathetic promptitude. Her unscrupulous enemies shook their heads, nevertheless, and said she was a clever woman, and that she must have made a clear two thousand pounds by the transaction.

Happily, Miss Weaver had a champion. Major Wenn wrote to the daily papers in reply to an impertinent criticism

which had appeared, touching Miss Weaver's benevolent schemes. He told her history in glowing terms, and promised the public, for Miss Weaver, a new institution, which would have the support of her former committee, who were prepared to pledge themselves for her honesty and singleness of purpose. Then the selfish opponents of Miss Weaver hid their heads; and by and by there appeared in the Marylebone Road "Miss Weaver's Retreat," an asylum for women and children in adversity. There were two classes of inmates, each class carefully separated from the other, each class under separate and distinct management. One side for respectable women, homeless and friendless; the other for fallen sisters and interesting police-court heroines.

"The Retreat," soon became famous for its excellent management. It was visited by clergymen, praised by magistrates, and described in glowing colors by a smart, descriptive writer, who sketched "London Life and London Shadows," for a popular daily paper. But Satan is a busy enemy. He put it in the minds of cynics and unbelievers to go about and say that Miss Weaver made a profit out of "The Retreat." "And even if she did," said her friends, though they denied it, "even if she did, surely the laborer was worthy of his hire; and if the subscribers who kept 'The Retreat,' going had to pay a matron to manage it, they could never get so single-minded, so generous, and so capable a woman at the head of affairs as Miss Weaver." Major Wenn told visitors who came to "The Retreat" from all parts of London, told them in confidence, that the fact was, Miss Weaver was the illegitimate daughter of an earl; that she felt her position so keenly she never meant to marry; and that she had, in consequence, dedicated her life to the work of charity. The earl allowed her a thousand pounds a quarter, and this was how she spent it. When a clever writer of gossip in a society paper got hold of this, and made a romantic paragraph about it, Miss Weaver's enemies were dumbfounded. They were silent for a long time, and Miss Weaver was followed by a crowd whenever she made an angelic descent upon a police-court, and rescued a victim from a cruel cell or, what was still more bitter, a cruel and heartless world.

Miss Weaver put her new charges into a brougham and drove them to "The Retreat." Major Wenn, like a kind, unpretentious gentleman, rode with the driver on the box. Mrs. Gardner took a violent dislike to the major as he

handed her into the brougham. In spite of the depression that possessed her, there was enough active life in her to shrink at the touch of Major Wenn. Miss Weaver, however, exercised a pleasant influence over her. The founder of "The Retreat," was a fascinating woman of thirty-five. Tall, graceful, dashing (but for a certain dignified reserve of manner which was quite in keeping with Major Wenn's account of her origin), she had an air of authority, a somewhat distinguished style. She was dark, though her complexion was inclined to be ruddy. Black, bead-like eyes, a square, strong forehead, rather prominent cheek-bones, an expansive mouth, strong jaw and chin. Her nose was a trifle weak as to character, but the general effect of the face was handsome: and when it laughed there was sly fun in it. If you had examined it closely you would have noted a want of repose, a twitching of the mouth, a restlessness of the eyes, a sort of active desire to keep you occupied, and not give you time to think. She dressed well, usually in black silk, and wore one ring, a diamond set in an ancient fashion, an heirloom which the earl had recently sent her, with a letter, in which he begged her to come to the castle and he would acknowledge her as his child, and give her the position which her merits might command. But the pure, high-minded woman could not be turned from her purpose; for she had all her father's obstinacy, combined with her poor dead mother's self-sacrificing nature.

The major was a retired officer of the Indian army, said to be a gentleman of means; though there were evil reports even about his financial position. "Be thou as pure as ice, as chaste as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny." Here was a man who had held Her Majesty's commission in the British army; here was a man who had fought and bled for his country; who on the downhill of life devoted himself to the beautiful and holy cause of charity; and there were calumniators base enough in London to attribute interested motives to him. One of Miss Weaver's rivals in charity-mongering had actually stated that the major lived at "The Retreat" half his time, and that the retationship between him and Miss Weaver was not creditable to the institution. But Major Wenn was not long in bringing that libeller to her senses (shade of charity, the scandalizer was a woman!) by a threatened action for libel. She apologized and paid £10 to "The Retreat fund," which was duly advertised.

Surely there must have been something very wicked in

the nature of Mrs. Gardner, as Miss Weaver observed a few days after the woman's admission to "The Retreat," for she had actually complained of the treatment she had received from Major Wenn. No well-organized mind could fail to be favorably impressed with the appearance of Major Wenn. He was no ordinary martinet. There was nothing starchy in his style. You would hardly have suspected him to have been a son of Mars. A smiling, talkative, nervous, demonstrative man, he was the life and soul of the committee meetings at "The Retreat." He had pale eyes, pale eyebrows, a puffy face, with a nose a little out of the perpendicular, a pale, lank moustache, a pale imperial, which he pulled with a white bejewelled hand, and a bald head, over which he scrupulously brushed long wisps of hair. He usually wore trousers of the tartan plaid, and a dark frock coat buttoned over his chest. He spoke in a husky voice, and chuckled in a husky voice at his own small jokes. Here was a man to respect! Did he not carry honesty in his face? Oh, base, unnatural spirit of calumny, to settle down upon the amiable and guileless Major Wenn, the champion of the lovely victim of a cruel world!—a woman who, recognizing an unhappy fate in the bar-sinister that blurred her escutcheon, said, "No! I will never marry; I will offer up my maiden life upon the altar of Charity!"

It was, at first blush, a pleasant change from Porter's Buildings to "The Retreat." Miss Weaver herself conducted Mrs. Gardner to a clean little bedroom in an upper story of the tall house, which had, from a warehouse, been converted into a retreat for the weary and unfortunate. It was a small room at the end of a long passage, which seemed to be an avenue of bedrooms, After she had shown her this sleeping-chamber, Miss Weaver took her down to her own sitting-room—a cheerful apartment, overlooking a few flower-beds, shut out from the road by a high wall. Baby was asleep, and Miss Weaver persuaded Caroline to lay it upon a comfortable, chintz-covered sofa, where Miss Weaver covered it over with an antimacassar, the weather still being very hot. Caroline looked peculiarly interesting. There was in her eyes a tired, pathetic expression that seemed rather to heighten than otherwise the girlish beauty of her face and figure. She looked more like an Italian girl than an American, and Miss Weaver did not require to be told that her new patient was no ordinary woman.

Miss Weaver had laid aside her thin silk paletot, and she was now in a plain black silk dress, with her hair brushed low over her forehead. She had excessively white teeth, and her smile was intended to be ingenuous and bland. Caroline began to like her at once; Miss Weaver was determined that she should. When Miss Weaver made up her mind to captivate a person, from a bishop down to a policeman, from a shrewd woman of the world down to a waif of the streets, she usually prevailed.

"What part of America did you come from, dear?" asked Miss Weaver, sitting before Caroline, with her back to the light.

"The South," said the new patient, in a gentle and subdued voice, a contrast to the strong but not unmusical tones of Miss Weaver.

"What part of the South, dear?" asked Miss Weaver kindly but peremptorily.

"I would rather not say."

"Why, dear?"

"I don't wish any one who knew my father to know the condition I am in."

"Your secret is safe with me, whatever it is, but I do not wish you to tell me anything you would rather not speak about. Of course you are married?"

The last question was put insinuatingly, as much as to say Miss Weaver would neither be shocked nor surprised if she were not.

"Yes; and it is to satisfy myself about my marriage that brought me to London."

"That's odd; how do you mean? If you know you are married, I don't see how you desire to be satisfied about it. Don't tell me, if you would rather not, but do if you think I can help you."

"I think you can."

"Then don't hesitate: I have great power in London, and I have the inclination to help you."

"When my husband left me he took away the certificate of my marriage."

"You want a copy from the vestry-book?"

"I want to be sure that I am legally married."

"Where were you married?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know?"

"I am a miserable woman," said Caroline, the tears welling up into her black eyes.

Miss Weaver sat down, moved her chair nearer to her, and took her hand.

"Trust me," she said; "tell me all—it will relieve your mind."

"When we came to England, I and my father," said Caroline, "my father, at a depot on the track, got out to have some refreshment. In our country we step upon the cars while they are moving; my father tried to do so, and was killed. The cars stopped; I thought it was for him to get in, but it was to pick up his dead body."

Mrs. Gardner paused here, and Miss Weaver put her arm round her shoulders.

"He was crushed almost out of recognition. A young Englishman had travelled with us from Liverpool, and my father and myself had found him very agreeable. He had already changed cards with my father, though my father was reticent, and had determined not to make friends in England; but he seemed to take a great fancy to Mr. Philip Gardner; so I felt he was a friend when my trouble came, as if I had known him for years. It was a dreadful shock to me, my poor father—a dreadful shock!"

"There, there, don't distress yourself," said Miss Weaver kissing the girl on the forehead.

"No; you are very kind, and I have not been used to much kindness lately."

"It was a very sad accident indeed." said Miss Weaver.

"I think I became insensible under the shock."

"No wonder, no wonder, poor child."

"It only seemed a few hours, but when I got better they had buried him, the poor dear—they had buried him; and Mr. Gardner took me away from the hotel. I had no other friend in the world except one, and my father would not have him as a friend, or let me think of him. He had fought against us in the war. Mr. Gardner was a bachelor, and has an estate in Westernshire, and he took me there. He proposed to marry me. He had been so good I could not find it in my heart to refuse him."

"Did you love any one else?"

"No, not quite."

"You liked some one?"

"Yes, a Northerner, the young man whom my father ordered never to speak to me. We met him in New York,

and I only saw him a few times during the course of the several weeks we stayed there."

"Well, dear, go on. I won't ask his name; you might think me inquisitive. Go on, love, go on."

"He explained to me the marriage ceremonies and customs of England, and said he would prefer the civil contract of registration. We went to an office and entered our names, and we were married; he didn't care to make a fuss, and he would rather his relations knew nothing about it. We went to London, got married, and returned the same day. Latterly my husband was not kind to me; he left me, and the house and everything was seized by the law, and when he went he wrote me a cruel letter, in which he said I was not his wife. I was free, and he wished me to go back to America."

"Yes?" said Miss Weaver, a little less affectionately, now that the story was nearly at an end.

"He took with him the registrar's paper, and every record about my father's death—where it took place, and all letters, and everything; and I want to find the office where we were married, and have a copy of the entry made out for me; not for my own sake, but for his—for Willie's."

She looked at the sleeping child as she spoke, and leaned her head upon Miss Weaver's shoulder. The lady of "The Retreat" rose and moved her chair to its former position.

"That's easy enough. Where was it?"

"I don't know."

"What was it like?"

"An office on a hilly street, with a chapel at the top, and a broad avenue running below."

"We will drive out to-morrow and find it. Major Wenn will help us: he is very clever. I think the place is near St. Paul's, down a court there, where odd persons, dressed like piemen, with white aprons, touch their hats, and ask what you require; we will find it, and then you shall tell me all about this Mr. Gardner, and we will see if we can't put things straight for you."

"Don't tell Major Wenn, please."

"Nonsense, my dear, he is the cleverest and best person in the world. What I should do without him in this great institution I really do not know."

"I would rather you didn't tell the major," said Caroline, sitting erect, and surprising Miss Weaver with a sudden look of firmness and decision, so different to her

gentle, yielding, submissive manner of a few minutes previously.

"Very well," said Miss Weaver, ringing an electric bell, which was answered on the instant by a hard-faced woman in a cotton dress.

"Send Nurse Belper to me."

The woman left without a word.

Presently, another hard-faced woman entered.

"Belper, carry that child in your arms, and show this lady to her bedroom, No. 40, on the upper story, and see that she has everything she requires."

"Yes, ma'am."

"I will carry the child, thank you," said Mrs. Gardner, rising.

"You are not strong enough to carry it up all those stairs. Belper will take it.

Caroline did not falter under the glance of authority and command which Miss Weaver turned upon her, but went and took up the child.

Belper looked aghast.

"My dear," said Miss Weaver, "I expect my servants to take their orders from me, and obey them. Give the child to Belper.

"No," said Caroline, pressing her child closer to her breast; "I will carry Willie, thank you."

Miss Weaver bit her lips; her eyes flashed angrily. She laid her hand upon Caroline's shoulder. It was a hard, strong hand.

"Give that child to the nurse. I am bound to maintain discipline in this establishment. Take it, Belper."

In an instant Caroline rushed to the door, and was out in the passage, followed quickly by Belper and Miss Weaver. The stubborn young woman was met by Major Wenn, who was on his way to Miss Weaver's little room.

"Hoity, toity!" he said in his husky though jaunty fashion, while barring the way against the woman and child; "what's all this about?"

Willie began to cry vociferously.

Miss Weaver seized the mother by her shoulders and literally ran her back into the room. Major Wenn and Belper followed. Miss Weaver shut the door, and briefly explained what had taken place.

"Out of pure kindness, major, I requested Belper to

carry the child for her, and she has turned upon us both like a tigress."

Caroline trembled with fear.

"Now I call you to witness, major," (the child sobbed and hid its face in its mother's neck), "that I only desire her to allow Belper to carry the child upstairs for her. If it were not for the absolute necessity of maintaining discipline in 'The Retreat,' I would give way; but Belper herself knows I dare not, and I will have her carry that child!"

"What is your objection, young woman?" said the major, going up to her familiarly, and taking her by the arm.

Caroline slunk away, and immediately placed Willie in Belper's arms.

"Number 40," said Miss Weaver. Belper went out. Mrs. Gardner followed her without another word.

CHAPTER IV.

A DECLARATION OF WAR.

THE sentiment of sympathy is not more quickly excited in the female mind than the feeling of aversion.

Mrs. Gardner had not intended to challenge the power of Miss Weaver; but that lady had chosen to see nothing in her conduct but a desire to question her authority, or determination to defy it.

Mis Weaver's instinct had discovered in this delicate-looking, pretty, slight woman a strength of will which seemed to challenge her own. There was an expression of determination in the black eyes which did not accord with the *petite* figure, the bending, shy manner.

It was as if the good woman and the bad recognized each other; as if the spirit of Virtue said to Vice, "I know you,—you are a wolf in sheep's clothing;" and as if Vice said, "Then you shall feel my teeth if you are wilful enough to discover them to any one else." Miss Weaver did not feel comfortable in the presence of the pure, searching eves. She affected a calmness she did not feel. She wished

she had never touched the woman. It seemed as if her presence in "The Retreat" was of bad augury. When their eyes met in angry controversy, Miss Weaver felt that a great battle had begun that might fill the whole place, perhaps resound throughout the great city itself.

Two opposite natures had met. They were fire and water. Miss Weaver felt as if it was necessary at once that one should control the other.

Strange that the little, friendless Southerner should make such a deep and serious impression upon the handsome, clever, powerful, and successful Miss Weaver.

It is almost beyond imagination to think that this proud, haughty "daughter of an earl," driving through London in purple and fine linen, should condescend to consider for a moment that poor little woman who had been hooted out of Porter's Buildings to acknowledge her homelessness in a Police Court. But Miss Weaver was always on the watch; her eyes were always busy; her mind was always at work. She saw and noted every straw on the stream, which way it went, where it paused; and something warned her that her new capture for "The Retreat" would give her trouble.

The brave adventurers of old who sailed out into unknown seas, and who penetrated into unknown lands, were not more wary than are the wicked adventurers of London.

The men and women who live by their wits undertake risks hardly less hazardous in their way than the adventurer of the romantic days who committed himself to fortune, and sought for wealth and fame in unknown worlds.

Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford, Mr. Philip Gardner, Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, Mr. Maclosky Jones, Miss Weaver—they had, so to speak, constantly to have their hands upon their weapons, ever ready for defence, always prepared for aggression. Any day, an error of judgment, a slip of the tongue, a daring enemy, might pull them down. They had to count chances of success and failure as carefully as any true and noble adventurer who went forth with flags and banners, with drums and trumpets. That their cause was bad enforced a more careful look-out and more discreet observance of omens and warnings.

Miss Weaver was no careless operator, such as Jeremiah Sleaford. She was not vulgar in her vices, like Migswood, nor was she a mere picker and stealer of the "Irish Moll"

type. On the contrary, she was a feminine Fernando Mendez Pinto—a Tartuffe in petticoats, a siren among men, a saint among woman. She made swindling a fine art; trading in charity an engrossing profession. If she had chosen to operate from a society point of view, she would have been a princess of fashion; she preferred the severe standpoint of philanthropy, and the *role* of a vestal virgin —so pure, so good, that Satan could not touch her. A mystery to women, a delightful example of bold charity to men, the lords of creation found a charm in her innocent daring, her philosophic courage, her utter absence of mock-modesty; and she had a foot and ankle that were perfectly charming. A lady of charity, she had bishops in her train; a woman of means, she commanded the sceptical. An adventuress of the highest ability, she had spies in her pay; a philanthropist whose deeds were before the world, she led benevolent disciples in silken chains, and in her "Retreat" the lowly, the humble, the persecuted, the forlorn of her unhappy sex, found a heaven of happiness and rest.

Nevertheless, Miss Weaver was afraid of the most forlorn, most friendless, most miserable of her unknown pensioners. Such is the influence of truth; such is the instinctive antipathy of the supremely wicked for the supremely good. A devil in the presence of an angel might be supposed to have similar sensations to those which afflicted Miss Weaver under the personal influence of Caroline Virginia Gardner.

"A perfect vixen," said Miss Weaver, when she and the major were alone; "a wilful, suspicious, haughty vixen.

"Do you really think so? said the major. "What a contrast to my adorable Isy!"

He caught Miss Weaver in his arms and kissed her.

"Don't be foolish, Wenn; I'm not in the humor for kissing. I could have smacked her."

"She's deuced pretty, though."

"Yes, I could see you were admiring her at the Police Court, and she has found you out already."

"How?"

"Didn't you see her shudder at you when you put her into the brougham? Didn't you see her start back just now when you went near her?"

"No, really, poor little trifler, she is a bad judge of character; well, and what is she? Who is she? What's to be done with her?"

"She's to be tamed," said Miss Weaver. "I'll let her see who is the mistress here."

"Is it worth while?" asked the major.

"Yes; I shall like the work," was the quick reply. "She has got up a romantic story about her father and her marriage. I believe she is an artful, designing creature. You should have seen her defy me! 'Take the child, Belper,' I said; 'I will take the child,' she said. 'I am usually obeyed here,' I said; 'take the child, Belper.' The next moment the little vixen flew to the sofa, took the child, and glared at me."

"She has a daring spirit, to defy you," said the major. "What a pair of eyes she has! They go through you. She's something like that girl whom Colonel Freebottle took into keeping from here."

"Don't make me jealous of her, as well as mad with her, Major Wenn, or I'll be inclined to strangle the hussy."

"Come in," said the major, in answer to a knock at the door.

The hard-faced woman entered, and presented, upon a silver tray, a card to Miss Weaver.

"Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson," she said.

"What's he like, Curtis?"

"A gentleman," said the hard-faced Curtis.

"Show him in."

The major left the room as Mr. Robinson entered.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIGHT BEGINS.

"Miss Weaver, I presume?" said Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, holding his hat and cane in his left hand, bowing deferentially, and posing with a languid, society air.

The lady bowed and waited.

"I observe that, with your well-known charitable instincts, you received into your 'Retreat' a young girl and her infant yesterday."

"Yes?" observed Miss Weaver, interrogatively.

"She called herself Mrs. Gardner?"

"Yes. Is she not Mrs. Gardner? Will you take a seat, Mr. (looking at his card) Fitzherbert Robinson?"

"Thank you."

Mr. Robinson sat down, and glancing for a moment at his gaitered, patent-leather boots, looked into Miss Weaver's face, which had assumed a quiet, patient expression.

"She is not Mrs. Gardner, then?"

"No; the fact is, the poor girl has been deceived."

"Indeed!"

"Thinks she is Mrs. Gardner."

"Yes?"

"I know her history."

"What is it?"

"Well, the story is rather a long one."

"You didn't come here to make me acquainted with it?"

"Well, no, not exactly; I came to see if I could be of any service to the girl."

"Has she no friends in London?"

"She had not until yesterday," said Robinson, smiling; "but yesterday brought Miss Weaver to her side—Miss Weaver and Major Wenn—I must not forget the major—and I hope I may add my own poor self as another friend."

The slight expression of sarcasm which obtruded itself in Mr. Robinson's manner when he referred to Major Wenn did not escape the ever-watchful eye of Miss Weaver.

"I am sure the major will feel proud when I report to him, at our next committee meeting, the high estimation in which (looking again at his card) Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson holds him."

Mr. Robinson rose, smiled, bowed and re-seated himself.

"And now, Mr. Robinson, as you are evidently a man of the world, and as you are certainly speaking to a woman of the world, perhaps you will explain your business."

"You have described me to the letter. If you do yourself justice, I may speak to you as plainly as I might talk to a man, under similar circumstances—to Major Wenn for example?"

"Just so; a woman who holds a medical diploma, who has ridden to hounds, who has been a prison visitor, and who undertakes the care, if not the reformation, of unfortunate woman and criminals, is not likely to be shocked

with anything a man of the world and a gentleman may have to communicate to her upon any subject."

Miss Weaver looked boldly at her visitor, and there was an invitation in her eye to talk and fear not.

"You place me at my ease. I will return candor for frankness. I am a bachelor. I have lived in the house where your new patient, client, or pensioner, whatever you may call her, has lived. I know her well. She is a single woman. I don't like the idea of her remaining here; I would like to induce her to accept my friendly protection."

"Yes," said Miss Weaver, unabashed; "do you know Major Wenn?"

"Slightly."

"I should prefer your speaking to him upon the subject. As secretary and treasurer, he has his own peculiar views upon cases of this kind; and he looks for a douceur, I believe, to the fund which has so many heavy calls upon it. He has little or no compunction how he strengthens my hands and the power of the committee financially. The philosophy that the end justifies the means is his religion, and 'The Retreat' has been a holy boon to hundreds of poor lost creatures who have been restored to honorable and virtuous paths by our course of kindly discipline."

"May I see Mrs. Gardner before I speak to the major upon the subject?"

"Certainly; I will send for her."

"I would like to see her alone."

"By all means."

Miss Weaver touched the bell: it was answered on the instant.

"Show this gentleman to the waiting-room in Corridor 5;" and inform No. 40 that a visitor has called to see her."

The attendant conducted Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson to Corridor 5; and Major Wenn returned to Miss Weaver's room.

"Well," said the major, in his small, affected voice, "what did Mr. Pompous, with his gloves and cane want?"

"He came about Mrs. Gardner."

"I thought so. Deuced pretty girl; no doubt about it."

"He wants to see you."

"I guessed it. Now I come to think, I know the fellow: he is a city adventurer, belongs to a good family, writes for

financial papers, has lots of money sometimes, and sometimes he has none; clever dog—we must be careful."

"You must be careful, you mean, Wenn—you, not us."

"Yes, love, I must. Oh, you are a clever darling, Isy!—a regular Pompadour."

"I wish I were, with you for my king."

"Ah, what a pair we should be! But really, Isy, my own Isabella with the gingham umbrella, you are, don't you know, the cleverest woman in the world."

"But not so deuced pretty as that minx in No. 40," said Miss Weaver, with a smile intended to be fascinating.

"Pretty!" lisped the major, tripping to her side and kissing her hand, "that is no word for your style of beauty; you are simply grand, Isy, you are a queen, a Pompadour."

"What is that noise?" Miss Weaver asked, quickly.

"I don't hear anything," said the major.

"Yes, a scream; and somebody is coming."

The major opened the door and went out, followed by Miss Weaver. They were just in time to obstruct a woman with a child in her arms. In another minute Mrs. Gardner and little Willie would have been in the street.

"Oh, don't stop me!" gasped the woman, as if she were being hunted by some wild animal; "don't, pray, stop me! Have mercy; have mercy!"

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Miss Weaver, taking the woman firmly by the arm.

"That man! Oh, that cruel man!"

"What the gentleman who called to see you?—your friend?" asked Miss Weaver, in a tone of great surprise, for an attendant and subscriber to "The Retreat" had appeared upon the scene.

"He is not my friend; he is not a gentleman! Oh, let me go; let me go!"

"I fear the poor girl's trouble has turned her head," said Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, coming up; "she has been very badly used. I don't wonder at her mind being influenced by it."

Miss Weaver put her arm round her as if to protect her.

"Don't tremble, dear, don't be afraid; they are all friends here," said the angelic lady of "The Retreat," whom the venerable subscriber admired.

"You see, Lord Follywell, it is not all sunshine, even here," she said. "Will you kindly step into my room, and

you, Mr. Robinson; the major will accompany you, and I will join you presently."

For Miss Weaver to ask was to command. The men disappeared.

"And now," said Miss Weaver, taking Mrs. Gardner by the shoulders and hurrying her back along the passage leading to the upper corridors, "what do you mean by disturbing a respectable establishment in this way?"

Mrs. Gardner did not speak. She hugged her child, and cowered beneath the iron grip of Miss Weaver.

"What do you mean by it?"

"You are hurting my shoulder."

"I will hurt you a great deal more if you play pranks here. You think you can beat me, do you? It is a fight between you and me, is it? You think you can defy me, do you? We shall see.

Along passages, up stairs, through corridors, and at last to No. 40.

"Now, Mrs. Gardner," said Miss Weaver, with an offensive emphasis on "Mrs.," "you will be good enough to stay there until I come back, and then you shall explain your conduct; yes, and atone for it, too, madam. I'll show you who is the boss here, as your vulgar countrymen say; I'll show you."

She pushed woman and child headlong into the room, took a master key from her pocket, and locked the door.

CHAPTER VI.

WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

HENCEFORTH, Mrs. Gardner had a hard life at "The Retreat." The lady of charity subjected her to a course of persecution. She hated her. The major would have let "the woman and her brat go about their business. Not so Miss Weaver. Vice had Virtue by the throat; Truth was at the feet of Falsehood. Miss Weaver took a delight in torturing her victim. She had her removed into the centre of corridor No. 5, so that she could have no communication with the outer world. The room she had first oc-

cupied looked upon the street. No. 35, where she now lodged, had no outlook: it was lighted from above.

"I think they mean to kill us, Willie," said Mrs. Gardner to her infant, after a week's entire exclusion from the outer world. "It is very lonely here; I only hope mamma will not lose her senses. I don't know how long it is since we came here love. Poor Willie!"

The little one looked pale. Miss Weaver had urged Mrs. Gardner to let the child be taken out, but the woman had resolutely resisted all attempts to separate her from the child.

"Why are you so unkind to me?" she asked, pitifully.

"Unkind!" exclaimed Miss Weaver. "You are a designing, wicked, vicious woman! You thought to usurp my authority, did you? You didn't know the woman you had to deal with. You are not the first vixen I have tamed, by many!"

"I have only this poor little thing to love and be loved by in the world," said No. 35. "My only resistance to your authority has been to cling to my child."

"Stuff! you opposed me from the first. As we left the Police Court you insulted Major Wenn. What had he done to you that you should shrink from him?"

"Nothing," said the woman, humbly.

"What have I done that you should commit an act of insubordination the moment you enter "The Retreat?"'

"I did not wish to part from little Willie."

"Was little Willie in question when you scandalized the house, and tried to disgrace it in the presence of a distinguished subscriber and my servants?"

"I am very sorry. That person you permitted to call upon me insulted me."

"Did he, indeed?" exclaimed Miss Weaver, folding her hands upon her knees, and regarding her victim with lofty disdain. "I should hardly have thought it possible to insult a woman in your position—a cast-off mistress, who is eventually found grovelling in the gutter of Porter's Buildings."

"I did not know where I was," said No. 35, the tears in her eyes, for she was weak, the spirit of resistance having been lowered by a mild diet and confinement.

"Didn't you?" said Miss Weaver. "I doubt it very much, unless you are a lunatic, and I am sometimes inclined to think that is your complaint. Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson

assures me that he said nothing to you unbecoming a gentleman."

"I expect I am strange to you and to the people here. I am a foreigner, you see, and you should pity me and let me go."

"Pity you and let you go, so that you may circulate all kinds of reports against "The Retreat!" I know you, my dear; I know the sort of viper I have nursed. I tell you again, you don't leave here except with your so-called husband or his friend, Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, the only persons who appear to know anything of you in England."

"Then I shall die here!" said No. 35, with a gentle firmness, and looking at her persecutor with that defiant expression which irritated Miss Weaver, and stimulated her in her course of torture.

"You may live or die, as you please. That is your own look-out. Don't imagine that threats of suicide have any effect upon me: I have heard them before."

"Oh, why do you delight to torture me? Why don't you let me go? Turn me out into the street, and I will bless you. I will never mention your name; I will try to forget it, and all the cruelties I am suffering."

"I dare say!" remarked Miss Weaver, with a contemptuous smile. "You shall go when you are tamed, and not till then; no, not if the process of taming kills you."

Miss Weaver rose and paced the room.

"May I not go out for a little fresh air?"

"No."

"My baby will die for the want of it."

"The baby can go out. The nurse shall take it for an airing."

"Why may not I go?"

"You are not fit to be trusted."

"Why?"

"You are crazy, you are violent; you are not fit to be trusted."

"Do you wish to drive me mad?"

Mrs. Gardner asked this question with a quick earnestness, as if she gave vent to a new thought that had just come into her mind.

"I shouldn't have to drive far," Miss Weaver answered, now preparing to leave the room.

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Whatever you like."

"Suppose I did all you desired, what is it?"

"Show a proper confidence in me, and not fly in the face of Providence. Don't pretend to be what you are not; and, above all things, don't imagine you can dictate to Miss Weaver!"

This is a fair example of the interviews which Miss Weaver had continually with her victim, only that she had not, until this occasion, fairly roused a suspicion in Mrs. Gardner's mind that there was a conspiracy against her to drive her crazy—perhaps to proclaim her mad. A new light dawned upon her now, and she commenced to rack her bewildered brain upon the subject of an escape. Little Willie had grown querulous of late, and she talked to him now more frequently when he was asleep than during his fretful vision of wakefulness.

"I have thought it out, Willie," she whispered; "for your sake, dear, we must get out of this place, and then we will throw ourselves at the feet of the Queen; she is a woman, and has a fond heart. We must stoop low to conquer, Willie; we have been too honest, too frank. I know, Willie, I know. We must imitate the Indian, dear, and be crafty. Let us think of the Indian: craft, love, craft! No, I am not going mad, love; I am coming to my senses. Yesterday I thought I would leap upon her like a tigress at her throat, tear her down, and kill her. My head throbbed then—my head. My hands felt like claws. But that is over now. I have prayed, love, for you, and I feel better; but I must be stronger, dear, before the time for action comes. If we could once get into the street, we could run; we could cry, "Help!" This is a free country; we should be rescued. That is why she dare not let me go out. Don't you see how fearful she is that I might speak against her and her prison? That gives me courage. She wishes to make out I'm mad, that my accusation may not be listened to. She is a bad woman, cruel, bad—wicked as Migswood; she keeps a prison, worse, and calls it heaven! I dreamed of an Indian last night. Craft, craft; seem what you are not. Oh father! father! why did you die and leave me?"

On the next day when Miss Weaver came in to indulge in ten minutes of verbal torture, and see her victim writhe Mrs. Gardner received her with unusual deference.

"It is good of you to come and see me, though you do say unkind things," she said, when Miss Weaver had locked

the door behind her, and taken a seat upon the only chair the room contained.

"Thank you."

"You seemed yesterday to think that Mr. Gardner might call?"

"Did I? I think not. If Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson has told him how he was received, I should hardly think it likely that Mr. Gardner would run the risk of calling."

"Mr. Robinson has not been again, then?"

"Yes, he has."

"Oh!"

"I suppose you will blame me for not acquainting you with the fact?"

"No."

"Really?"

"I should have had no right to blame you."

"Indeed! What condescension, what justice!"

"I don't like him; but he says he was my husband's friend."

"You don't like me," said Miss Weaver, "and I am the only person who has befriended you."

"I fear I have been wrong."

"Wrong!" exclaimed Miss Weaver; "your conduct has been shameful."

"I expect I misunderstand Mr. Robinson."

"You misunderstand everybody."

"Yes, I think I do."

"I thought you would think so eventually."

"I have not been accustomed to be controlled."

"Do you want to beg my pardon?"

"I do, I do," exclaimed No. 35, flinging herself at Miss Weaver's feet.

"Very well," said the Lady of Charity, raising her, "I will consider about it. I must have proofs of your sincerity given me besides this humbleness. You may kiss my hand."

No 35 kissed the extended hand.

"Well, what are you prepared to do to prove your sincerity?"

"I will see Mr. Robinson."

"Yes, that's a step in advance. What will you say to him? Complain of your treatment by Miss Weaver?"

"No, indeed, I will not."

"Will you write me a letter? Express your regret, and thank me for my kindness and care."

No. 35 hesitated.

"Supposing I gave you the sitting-room, No. 30, with a piano, and treated you as I meant to have done at first, if you had behaved well?"

"I would do all you could wish."

"Very well."

Miss Weaver left the room. Caroline kissed her baby.

The truth is, Miss Weaver had that day received several anonymous threats of exposure. She was accustomed to epistolary stabs in the dark, and had been courageous enough to place some of them in the hands of the police; but this morning a placard, with the word "Impostor," had been posted on the entrance-doors, a letter of "Inquiries concerning 'The Retreat' had appeared in a daily newspaper. These incidental troubles harassed her at the moment, more particularly because a police superintendent had called to inform Miss Weaver that Mrs. Gardner would have to appear next week at the Sessions against Irish Moll, It had therefore become suddenly necessary that No. 35 should either be brought into a more friendly condition of mind or worried into a lunatic asylum. She had not communicated her views in regard to the latter contingency to Major Wenn, but she had a plan full of audacious cruelty to compass her end should she be pushed to extremities. Finding No. 35 at her feet was, therefore, an event full of satisfaction to her. Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson had informed Major Wenn that, if Mrs. Gardner would come to Hanover Gate and keep house for him, he would take care of her, communicate with her friends, and be most happy to contribute a handsome sum towards the funds of "The Retreat." The major had informed Mr. Robinson that it was quite a common thing for Miss Weaver to receive bank notes for hundreds and thousands without a line or a word, anonymous donations for the great cause of charity. Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson had said he had the greatest confidence in the major, and that he would do anything in the world for Mrs. Gardner. The major had informed Miss Weaver that Robinson was in luck, that he had lots of money; and Miss Weaver had said she had only one hope now, that Mrs. Gardner would, of her own free will, leave the institution under the protection of her friend; such an arrangement would meet the case, and relieve her of a difficulty. Major Wenn feared the girl would never do that, "so deuced obstinate, you

know, like all pretty, dark-eyed women." Miss Weaver thought she would.

"I was to show you into No. 30, the sittin'-room, marm," said the hard-featured Belper.

Mrs. Gardner followed her.

A dainty luncheon was laid. There was fruit upon the table, and wine.

"Miss Weaver said you were to help yourself."

"Thank you," said Mrs Gardner.

Willie stretched out his hands to the grapes.

"My darling," said the mother, "you shall have some."

The little one devoured the grapes and cooed.

"We must be careful, Willie," said the mother; "taste the wine first, that's what Indian would do."

She tasted the fresh, cool claret. It was pleasant to the palate after a course of bad tea and water.

"I think it is good; but we mustn't be poisoned, Willie," she whispered. "Chicken and salad, Willie; we are in favor you see. And we must eat and drink to get strong, love."

She sat down, the child upon her knee, and ate the luncheon with the relish of a hungry woman.

There was a piano in a corner of the room; in another, an easel, canvas, and paints. Mr. Robinson had told Miss Weaver of the girl's accomplishments. Mrs. Gardner looked at these marks of delicate attention, first with delight, then with suspicion, then with fear.

As she expected, Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson was presently announced. Her heart stood still for a moment, but she rose to receive her visitor with apparent ease and calmness.

"Miss Weaver said you would receive me. I need hardly say how proud I feel," said Mr. Robinson, his hat and cane in his gloved right hand. "I have only called to pay my respects, and to ask if there is anything I can do for you."

"You are very kind. I think not." said Mrs. Gardner.

"Nor for the dear little boy?" asked Mr. Robinson, looking at Willie in his mother's arms.

"If you could induce Miss Weaver to let me take him out for a little walk," said the woman quickly; but, correcting herself as quickly—"no, on second thoughts, pray don't, she may think I have complained, and I have no desire to do so.'

"Pray command me," said Mr. Robinso

"Have you heard anything more of my husband?"

"Nothing that I should care to tell the woman he has deceived."

"I would like to know."

"He has gone abroad with a lady," said Mr. Robinson, uttering a suggestive falsehood.

"With a lady!"

"Ah, my dear madam, I only wish I could persuade you to think as much of me as you once thought of him. But, there, I must not touch on forbidden ground; only say that I may call again, that is all, and I will trust to time to make us better friends."

"Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson," she said, "I will be glad to see you again. I only wish I were as free to come and go."

There was an invitation to parley in the woman's manner which caught Mr. Robinson at once.

"You might have all the freedom you could desire if—pardon my boldness—if you would extend the smallest amount of friendship to me."

"I was very rude to you, I fear?"

"No; that would be impossible. Mrs. Gardner could not be rude."

"Yes, I was, but you have forgiven me; this visit tells me that."

Mr. Robinson's vanity, to say nothing about the mad passion this pretty, uncommon woman had excited in his selfish nature, made him an easy prey to the woman's wiles.

"Forgive you! I love you!"

"You must not say that," said Mrs. Gardner, trembling with fear, but nerved to her bold plan of escape. "I cannot listen to it; not yet, at all events."

"You give me hope! My dear Mrs. Gardner, what shall I do to prove my devotion?"

Mrs. Gardner was in her turn taken off her guard.

"Have you a carriage?"

"Yes."

"And where is it now?"

"At the door."

"Instruct your coachman to take me and my little Willie for an airing."

"I will. Excuse me a moment; I will return immediately."

He left the room. Mrs. Gardner drank a glass of wine.

"We must keep our courage up, Willie; even the Indian needs fire-water. Oh, Willie, how my heart beats!"

She walked to the window and looked out upon a small forest of chimney-stacks.

"A city of bricks and smoke, Willie! Is it really as cruel and hard as it looks? Heaven protect us!"

She gave Willie a teaspoonful of wine. He made faces at it, and then smacked his lips.

Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson returned. He looked crest-fallen. He stammered.

"She won't let you," said Mrs. Gardner, quickly. "I knew she wouldn't. I'm a prisoner here—a prisoner, sir. 'Command me,' you said. I did. You are re-commanded. You thought you were somebody. You see! But hark! hush! what am I saying? Forget what I have said. I don't want to offend Miss Weaver, nor to make you think me foolish and unkind. But, oh, it is hard to be locked up here!"

Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson raised his finger in an attitude of warning. He had heard a well-known footstep. Miss Weaver knocked at the door, paused, and entered the room.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Gardner, that you have made a request which is against the rules of 'The Retreat'. I would have liked to show you that my sentiments towards you are kindly, but discipline must be maintained. The request, however, and the very significant way in which you have received your friend, induce me to say something which may perhaps save time, and relieve Mr. Robinson of his apparent embarrassment in making a proposition which I think redounds to his credit, and which will help all of us under the circumstances."

Miss Weaver took a seat, and motioned to Mr. Robinson that he should do the same.

"May I lay little Willie upon the bed?" Mrs. Gardner asked, for she felt sure Miss Weaver was going to say something which would try all her strength of dissimulation, and something which she would not like even her speechless child to hear.

"Certainly, yes; anything you wish."

But Miss Weaver left the room with her; and then Mrs. Gardner changed her mind for she had a morbid fear of

letting the child be out of her sight. They might steal it, she thought.

"You are indeed a whimsical person," said Miss Weaver, but ill concealing the annoyance she felt at this continued evidence of mistrust. "She thinks she is fooling me," thought the wily Weaver: "we shall see."

CHAPTER VII.

MR. FITZHFRBERT ROBINSON WANTS A HOUSEKEEPER.

"Now, Mrs. Gardner, listen," said Miss Weaver. "Mr. Robinson is a gentleman of means and reputation; he wants a housekeeper; he knows your husband, and seems to be the only friend you have in London; he tells me he is willing to give you that position at a good salary, and I wish to ask you if it is an offer you care to entertain."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Gardner," said Robinson; "Miss Weaver is a very business-like woman; she puts the matter very directly and without sentiment. Will you permit me to add that, in advertising the vacancy, I described the engagement as that of a lady housekeeper who would have a staff of servants, her own apartments, and every possible consideration of respect, and I——"

"Thank you," said Mrs. Gardner; "I understand. Would you allow me, before I answer you, to have a few words with Miss Weaver alone?"

"By all means."

"Then I will show I trust you by asking you to wait at the end of the corridor and see that nobody touches my child. I am going to lay him down upon the bed. Will you?"

"You honor me," he said.

She saw she had conquered Robinson.

Mrs. Gardner went straightway into No. 35, the door of which Miss Weaver had left open. The Lady of Charity followed her. She had not seen the knife the desperate woman had concealed—a knife which had been brought up with the luncheon.

"Mr Robinson, stand by that window, will you, please, till you see me return for Willie?"

"I will," said Robinson, looking defiantly for the first time at Miss Weaver.

"Mad as a March hare!" said Miss Weaver, still looking ahead. Her plans always stretched away into the future.

"Now, madam," said Miss Weaver, when the two women confronted each other alone, "after this new mountebank exhibition, perhaps you will begin."

"You want me gone," said Mrs. Gardner.

"Not more than you want to go."

"You hate me," said Mrs. Gardner, the wine stimulating her. She had not tasted anything stronger than tea for more than a week.

"Not more than you hate me."

"I don't hate you; let me go freely, and I promise you never to breathe a word of this disgraceful intrigue."

"I don't understand you."

"Yes, you do."

"I lie then, do I you vixen?"

Miss Weaver stepped towards her panting opponent. The desperate woman clutched the knife.

"Woman!" exclaimed the American, "be careful!"

Even the bold Weaver paused, though she only saw the flashing eye and the distended nostril of the southerner, in whose attitude there was a suggestion of the tigress.

"Is there no way for me to leave this place but with that man? Answer me straight, and let us understand each other."

"If you will sit down, and talk like a rational being, I will listen; if not, I must leave you."

While she spoke she saw the knife. Miss Weaver was no coward. With the rapidity of thought, and the strength of a man, she seized No. 35 from behind. There was in her method of attack all the deftness of a woman who had been a nurse in a lunatic asylum. Mrs. Gardner was powerless. The knife dropped out of her hand. She was cowed. She looked up at the giantess who gripped her, in fear as a child might have done.

"You theatrical hussy! Now, what have you got to say?"

"Nothing. Forgive me; don't tell Mr. Robinson; don't make a noise," gasped the victim.

"Very well then, listen; for I don't intend to waste any more time upon you."

"Yes; I am listening."

"You decide at once whether you leave 'The Retreat' or stay; you leave it at your own written and expressed request with Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, as his housekeeper, or you stay."

"Suppose I stay, what will you do with me?"

"Give up the institution to you, hire servants to wait upon you, let you live in luxury, give you the right even to call Major Wenn your intimate friend."

Mrs. Gardner shuddered at the malicious way in which Miss Weaver hissed this into her ear.

"You didn't think I should be so kind as that eh? Did you think I'd starve you, lock you up in darkness, never let you see daylight, take your child from you, drive you crazy—so crazy that you'd have to be chained up in a cellar, and finally buried in a ditch?"

Miss Weaver bent over the terrified woman, clutching her by the shoulder and glaring at her, hissing the cruel words into her face.

"Oh, don't pray don't!" exclamed the victim. "I'll do what you wish, whatever it is."

The moment Miss Weaver relaxed her grip, the woman fell back into her chair all pale and limp.

"Here none of that, no fainting, rouse yourself," said Miss Weaver, shaking her."

"Yes, yes," said the woman, making a mental effort, and staggering to her feet, "I know. Don't touch me; I will go: give me a little wine; I am weak."

Miss Weaver poured out half a tumbler of wine. The poor woman drank it eagerly.

"Thank you: tell Mr. Robinson I will go with him."

"Very well; now sit down and compose yourself."

Mrs. Gardner sat down,

"You had better go to your room and lie down for half an hour. I will send you up a lace mantle and a few things. I would like you to go away comfortably. I don't bear malice, though you did try to stab me with a knife."

"I!" said the woman; "I try to stab you?"

"Do you deny it? Do you call me a liar again?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"I don't blame you; it is easy to see that you are not quite answerable for your actions."

"Forgive me," said the woman. "I will go to baby. Tell him I am ready; tell him, will you?"

She went to her room. Mr. Robinson was strictly guarding the portal. He bowed to her as she went in, and then he walked to the sitting-room. Miss Weaver had beckoned him.

Little Willie was fast asleep. Mrs. Gardner flung herself down by his side, and tried to pray. Presently she got up.

"He cannot hear me in this vile place," she said; "God has left it. He will not look upon it any more than he would upon The Cottage. And oh, Willie, the craft of the Indian is no good against the devil! She is Satan in the guise of a woman! We must go, dear, if we would escape starvation, chains, and death. Oh, she is cruel; there is torture, murder, in her cold eyes. Once outside this prison, this den, we will trust to Providence. Better to die in the streets and be buried in a ditch, Willie, than here. Pray heaven I keep my senses! I will; for your sake I will."

She crept by his side and shut her eyes.

"I will try and sleep. I must not lose my strength; I shall want it soon. O heaven! give strength to my will, and wings to my feet."

"She accepts your offer," said Miss Weaver to Mr. Robinson.

"The darling!" exclaimed Robinson.

"If you please to call her darling I have no objection; I thought it was housekeeper."

"You are so witty and cynical."

"She will be ready this evening at dusk."

"Delightful! I have to thank you, Miss Weaver."

"Not at all; it is nothing to me. She is a lonely and friendless woman. I rescued her from starvation and infamy. You are her husband's friend—her only friend in London; you offer her honorable employment, she accepts it."

"Just so—most business-like; thank you."

"You will order your carriage to be here at eight o'clock. You will call for the lady and her child; in the meantime she will have written to me informing me of her intentions; you will also have sent me in writing your application in regard to her; then No. 35 will be vacant; and I trust Mrs. Gardner will, through your charitable interposition,

find her friends, and be happy ever afterwards. There! Does not that make quite a touching and romantic story?"

"It does, truly. You should join the staff of some popular magazine, and write novels."

"My dear Mr. Robinson, I have gone through all that. I have been a journalist, a hospital nurse, I have my diploma as a doctor, I am writing for two scientific journals at this moment, and I have ridden to hounds as straight as the huntsman himself."

"You are a wonderful woman!"

"I should not be here otherwise."

"True."

"Now, a word of warning about Mrs. Gardner. As she enters your carriage we shall give her no chance of running away. See that you are equally cautious when she arrives at your house. Do you understand——"

"But do you suspect that——"

"I suspect nothing," replied Miss Weaver. "But this woman is erratic, and for some reason or another she dislikes me. Her mind has been influenced against me; if she could create a scandal about 'The Retreat' she would. When I give her into your care all I ask, is that you shall really take her home; keep her there four-and-twenty hours, and then she may say or do what she pleases."

"I quite understand."

"If she attempts to run, take hold of her arm; clutch her tight. A scandal would do you no good."

"Good! Just now it would do me a great deal of harm."

"Very well, then, pay attention to what I say."

"All right; I'll take care, never fear."

"Then you shall come to the office and write me that letter."

"By all means."

They returned to the sanctum of the Lady of Charity. Major Wenn was there drawing out checks for the signature of Miss Weaver. Mr. Robinson wrote the letter which Miss Weaver required, and when it had been duly addressed and placed in Miss Weaver's hand, Major Wenn went out with Mr. Robinson to luncheon.

Mrs. Gardner was sitting by the window, above a forest of chimneys springing out of acres of roofs dingy with smoke and soot. She was soothing little Willie, who would burst into fits of crying, every tear that rolled down his cheeks

paining the suffering mother more than if it was a drop of her heart's blood. Cruel London might have done its worst with her but for little Willie. She talked to him, kissed him, prayed that Heaven would comfort him. But she prayed without hope. If she had been looking upon the green meadows of Essam, she might have fancied she saw some glimpse of light in the darkness of her fortunes. But London seemed to stare her in the face, hard and grim and cruel.

"And this," she said "is the land which your grandfather described as tender and chivalrous! This is the country that sympathized with the South in the hour of its trouble! This is the land that stands by the weak and defies the strong! This is the land flowing with milk and honey! Oh, Willie, Willie, how we have been deceived, betrayed to our destruction! Let your own little heart pray for mamma, dear! In your baby-language, ask the angels that whisper to you to guide mamma this day, to have her in their keeping this once, dear, this once."

And she mingled her own tears with those of little Willie, who suddenly looked up at her and smiled.

"My darling!" exclaimed the mother, "you understand me, sweetie, you do; you have said something to the angels; they have answered you.

Baby cooed, and put his little arms around the mother's neck.

"Bless you, my own! my angel! Let me kneel and thank your companions with wings, your playmates whom I cannot see."

She knelt with little Willie in her arms. A gleam of sunshine fell upon the woman, and dwelt lovingly in the room. She took the dancing light as another omen of good promise; and, when the hour came for action, she was calm, self-possessed, and resolute.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GARRISON MAKES A SORTIE.

Now it came to pass that on the day when Mrs. Gardner was to make a sortie from the Weaver garrison Mr. Henry Brayford was in search of the enemy who was the beseiged woman's convoy in friendly disguise.

It was a seige to Mrs. Gardner, this shutting up in "The Retreat." She was invested by Miss Weaver and Major Wenn. Her liberty was dominated by redoubts; her movements were under constant surveillance.

While she had agreed to march out under convoy, she was only meeting craft with stratagem. Her surrender, as a prisoner of war, to one of the beseigers was, after all, only a sortie for liberty, an effort at escape, a determination to fight when the convoy was beyond the immediate lines of Major Wenn and his ally. Mrs. Gardner had laid her plans. But she had a triple alliance against her, and the offensive forces were far-seeing, daring, and unscrupulous.

If Mr. Brayford had only known how hard beset the poor woman was! He lived in the neighborhood of "The Retreat." But he was not only ignorant of the case; he did not even know Mrs. Gardner; he had never heard of her. How should he have dreamed even of that hand of fate which was reaching over the broad waters of the Atlantic, to gather into a circle the lives that are bound up in this narrative, when he was putting his trust in Jeremiah Sleaford, and waiting for the shower of gold that was to come out of the Pactolean clouds of the Financial Society! Poor Brayford knew nothing of the mysterious hand that had directed those Southern fugitives, deluding one to his death, and delivering the other into the hands of the Philistines! Yet the shadow of that distant ship gliding out of New York harbor to battle with "the rolling forties"[7] fell upon our early pages. The historian was enabled to picture to you the gentle, trusting, but fearful girl clinging to the side of her gray-headed, distraught father; to show you them, coming over the sea to influence the destinies of men and women in England of whom they had never heard; bringing

with them the silken threads of romance necessary to the weft of this story of real life, to be, in their turn, woven into the plot which Fate had designed beforehand; one of them to contribute a thread of sombre blackness, the other to supply skeins of varied hues, and, unsuspected in her gloomiest moments, to be the innocent cause of a tragic stain in the golden weft.

Who shall venture upon a controversy with Fate? Who shall dare to challenge her stern decrees? To say that it might have been better for Caroline Virginia Denton, and her father, to have stayed in their own country is to be guilty of an arrogance that pretends to lift the veil of the future. Who knows what other ills might have beset their path; what greater, bitterer trouble might have tortured their existence! Moreover, it was ordained that yonder suffering woman, praying for deliverance from the snares and pitfalls, the pirates, thieves, and murderers of Cruel London, should bear her cross in the great city. She had a mission. The threads of her influence are black, gray, golden, and red; and as we stand upon the brink looking into the Future, it seems as if Fate had another minister standing darkly by her side, with vengeance in his eye; but he looms up, too shadowy yet for recognition—his face is strange, and his form is shrouded in a mist.

What can a poor creature such as Brayford have to do with Fate, or Fate with him? It may be that this ungainly comical person is destined to play the part of the angel, for whose aid the victim of "The Retreat" was praying. For it is certain that Brayford is within the shadow of the fortress, and Fate had arranged that he should be in search of Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson at the severest moment of Mrs. Gardner's peril.

When Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford was reviewing the past and discounting the future at Boulogne, his memory failed to carry the slightest reminiscence of Mr. Brayford. The fact that he and his colleagues had utterly ruined Brayford quite escaped his thoughts. No man could have been more thoroughly and completely ruined than Harry Brayford, the comic epitaphist and the melancholy farceur! As a mural mason he was wiped out. Not a single cemetery company would recognize him. Monolith Cottage was levelled to the earth. The Mausoleum and Marble Works at Paddington had been remodelled by the new proprietors. They wouldn't even employ Brayford. They said he was

as big a tom-fool as his clerk, "the Wonner," as Brayford called him. The serio-comic countryman who had amused the janitor at the office of the Financial Society, and who had delighted Mrs. Kester with his attentions at a certain reception, was now an out-at-elbow nobody. The Syndicate, the Cemetery Company, and Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford combined, had left him stranded on the inhospitable shores of Cruel London.

At first Brayford had accepted the situation with a light heart. He sought consolation at the Footlights. But it was here that he first thoroughly realized his misfortunes. The Footlighters who owed him money cut him for fear he would ask to be repaid his loans; those who had cultivated him with a lively hope of sums to be borrowed, snubbed him because their chances were at an end. The club generally seemed to agree that he was a fool; that he had frittered away a fine business; that he had peddled in literature out of vanity, and neglected work he understood; that but for his money he would not have been tolerated; that he had introduced a lot of men into the club to serve his own private ends; that he had, in fact, used the club; that he had been ostentatious in his hospitality; that properly considered, he had really no qualification for the club; and that altogether he was neither entitled to sympathy nor respect. There were a few members of the Footlights who did not hold these views. The chairman was a notable exception; so were the secretary and treasurer. But this did not compensate Brayford. The shock he had received overwhelmed him. He went to "the boys" for comfort; they jibed him. He asked them for the bread of consolation; they gave him the stone of contempt.

But a worse discovery than this of the uses of money was the revelation that his little farces and comic songs had only been accepted because he was "a good fellow, you know, and it's easy just to push a first piece in now and then—it pleases him, and he don't want money." When Brayford turned from the grave and the comic epitaph to the solemn farce and the sad comic song for the means of a livelihood, he was laughed at by the very men who, over little dinners at the Albion, or drinks at the club, had praised his songs and listened to his satirical three-act "In Memoriam." Besides, he had neglected his dress; he no longer wore gloves, his beard was unkempt, his hat was

greasy, his boots were not clean, he showed his poverty in the careless tie of his cravat. Brayford was literally "broke," as they would say in Lincolnshire; "stumped," as they put it in London; "in the gutter," as he said himself to his old friend "the Wonner," who spent the spare pennies he could scrape together in buying newspapers and cutting out the "deaths" for circularization. "The Wonner" thought his old chief was simply "up to his larks," that the sale of Monolith Cottage was a kind of pantomime joke, and Mr. Brayford's poverty something intended to be just as diverting as the many other numerous eccentricities of which he had been guilty. The only incident of the new phase of their lives that puzzled him was the occasional want of sufficient food. This bothered "the Wonner," but not half as much as it bothered Mr. Brayford.

On the day when Mrs. Gardner was to make her sortie from "The Retreat," Mr. Brayford had heard that Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson had profited largely by his downfall. He never liked Robinson. On the contrary, if Brayford's mild nature was capable of supporting the passion of hatred, he hated Robinson. He had not only heard that his former colleague had made money out of the sale and re-sale of the Paddington Works, but that, if he chose to give Brayford employment in connexion with a little business which Brayford had started, he could keep himself and "the Wonner" continually occupied. He had, therefore, vowed he would see Robinson that day, for "the Wonner" had complained for the first time since their troubles that he was hungry.

Mr. Brayford had called at Robinson's office, in the city, three times; he had followed Mr. Robinson to his club; he had been on his track all day. He walked along Regent Street, as the shops were all closing, towards Hanover Square, with the intention of posting himself outside Robinson's house until he came home. He was hungry himself now, and the little money owing to him and "the Wonner" for their last job was not due until the morning.

As he turned to go into the square, Mr. Robinson's brougham passed him, and he saw his old colleague's face in the light of a gas-lamp. He ran after the carriage, and stopped with it opposite Mr. Robinson's house. His hunger goaded him, it made him angry to see his former colleague with a fine carriage and horses, while he grovelled, as he had tried to explain to "the Wonner," in the gutter. At that

moment he hated Mr. Robinson even more than he hated Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford and the entire Sleaford family.

The handle of the carriage-door was cautiously turned. A footman leaped down from the steps, and opened the door of the house with a latch-key.

Mr. Robinson stepped from the brougham, and proceeded to hand out a lady with a child in her arms.

Brayford noted all this as he stood in the shadow of the carriage-lamps.

Instead of taking the hand carefully held out to assist her, the woman bent her head, darted beneath Robinson's arm, and ran with the speed of an antelope.

Robinson and the footman were after her in a moment, and Brayford after them. The woman screamed loudly as Robinson caught her. He seized her savagely.

The next moment he was sprawling in the road, and the footman as suddenly found it desirable to run to a place of safety on the other side of the way.

A cautious policeman, who had witnessed the incident, noticed that the person who had been knocked down gathered himself together as if to resent the attack. He therefore, walked quietly round the next street, so as to enter the square from another point. When he came back to the scene of the disturbance, the combatants were no longer there. The woman was gone; the child was gone; their champion had disappeared. All was quiet at the house of Mr. Robinson. No carriage stood at the door. A group of people at the corner of the street were talking about a fight. P. C. XX marched courageously into their midst, and demanding "What's up?" also in the same breath requested the loiterers to "Move on!" But the little crowd declined to obey the latter injunction, though it was very communicative in reply to the former. P. C. XX took out a book, made some notes, wrote down several addresses; and presently Hanover Square resumed its ordinary appearance.

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

A WORLD OF SNOW AND TWO LOVERS.

"He saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth," and silence reigns over the valley. The squirrel seeks his sheltering nook. The quail, halting upon the wing, falls dead in the canon. Glittering spears hang upon the mountain crags. The river pauses in its course. The trees moan in the night. The firs are black. They look like funeral plumes. The sky is a dull leaden pall stretched over the face of nature.

The miners of the Sacramento Valley huddle together and strengthen the timbers of their rude dwellings. They bid each other "Good-night" with an extra grip of the hand. They feel that on the morrow many of their huts may be as far apart as if they were divided by mighty seas. The air is filling with feathery particles of snow. The sky is being gradually shut out. All the world is hushed, as if hill and dale, listening to the Divine command, waited its solemn and sure fulfilment. "He saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth."

On the morrow an awful silence comes, more appalling in its stillness than the rush and war of a tempest. Dead silence broods over a world of snow. Trees of snow. Hills of snow. White mountains tower up to an unseen sky. The valley creeps in snowy undulations up to the mysterious rocks. It is the picture of a dead world, buried.

A calm monotony of hill and dale, without a rugged edge. Every corner has been rounded. Even the trees, which thrust their branches into the chilly air, have the

mound-like form of all natural protuberances. It is a world of snowy hillocks, a mighty graveyard, with feathery plumes that moult sprays of frozen swansdown.

In a well-built hut in Decker's Gulch, among the lonely Californian hills, two miners sat by a glowing pine-log fire. The locality had been named after its fortunate owner, who had recently sold it to a party of capitalists in San Francisco. The purchasers were to enter upon possession in the spring. In the meantime winter had seized the property and fixed an icy seal upon its golden treasures.

Tristram Decker sat propped up with skins and pillows upon a rude bench, with his thin hand in Jack Kerman's brawny fist, on the first night of the great snow of this winter season in the mountains of the Sacramento. A long, poetic face, full of lines and tokens of a hard life; blue, sanguine eyes; a spare, bony figure; long brown hair; hollow cheeks, with a hectic flush beneath the eyes; Tristram Decker was the wreck of a powerful young man. Our old friend Kerman, broad of shoulders, strong of limb, tall, stalwart, with his frank face half hidden behind thick whiskers and beard, was almost a cruel contrast to the nervous wasted figure of Decker, the enthusiastic lover whose face his persecuted countrywoman thought she had seen, in the days of her loneliness and trouble, loking at her over the hedge in the English valley of Essam.

It was Christmas Eve. Not alone the silence of the snow and the chance that they were both in a living tomb, but the time itself made tribute upon the best and noblest instincts of their nature. Tristram Decker believed he was dying of consumption. His expected end was near, though he continued to say he would not die until he had seen Old England. He had, nevertheless, his hours of depression when he feared that physical weakness would exhaust his strength of will. This was one of his bad nights. He had been talking to Kerman about the end. He had been sorrowing over the prospect of his companion being left alone in this wilderness of snow.

"If I could only pull through until the weather clears," he said, speaking slowly and in pain. "It is hard, after all your kindness, to leave you by yourself. I've been a deal of trouble to you, Jack, but you'd rather have me stay, for all that, dear old boy."

Kerman pressed the hand that lay in his as gently as if it had been a woman's.

"I think," continued the invalid, "I think I shall have to go in a day or two, Jack, and I want you to get used to the idea of it. Don't be afraid, as I should be if we could change places, when you wake some morning and find me lying still."

"You're depressed to-night. I have put these thoughts into your head by talking about Christmas," Kerman replied. "You must cheer up, old boy; it's the nature of your illness that makes you gloomy; and, instead of being cheerful and helping you to keep your spirits up, I've been dumpy and miserable."

"No, no, Jack; I think you are the best fellow in the world. They talk of the tenderness of a woman by a sick-bed, but your gentle patience couldn't be equalled by any woman—except one, perhaps—except one."

"Ah," responded Kerman, "we never know how much good there is in women; fact is, we don't understand them; they're so true and staunch that they go on being heroines, and keeping it a secret all the time somehow. I suppose a man is naturally such a selfish fool that he hasn't the heart or the sense to see what a woman's at."

"Now you're thinking of Jane Crosby," said Tristram.

"I'm always thinking of her."

"And I of Caroline Denton."

"Good bless them both!" said Kerman.

"Amen and Amen!" exclaimed Tristram.

The logs on the fire settled down, and sent a cloud of sparks up the chimney. They looked like a swarm of golden bees.

"Your Christmas fire wants to join in our good wishes," said the invalid. "How fond you are of the fire, Jack. Tell me about your dear old country. It seems to me as if I have got to know England through this fire of yours. I 've lived all my life in a land of stoves, and your fireside is like poetry to me, something in a story, like all your English history, with knights and castles in it, and always green valleys, old homesteads, and dreamy, moss-grown villages. I wish I'd gone to England when I left New York, that is, if I could have come across you in your own country."

"You ought to have been a poet, Tristy," said Kerman. "What brought a fellow like you fighting Indians and digging for gold is a puzzle to me."

"Tell me about your English firesides, Jack," said

Tristram, his eyes fixed upon the red-glowing logs. "Perhaps Caroline Denton is sitting by one of them. I should like to think so,—sitting with her grim old father. Ah, he was a hard old man, was "Secesh Denton," as they called him. It wasn't my fault that I was a Federal soldier; it was the chance of birth. A man can't help it if he's born in the North; everybody can't be born in Maryland or Virginia. What we are born at all for is a mystery to me. But talk of England, Jack, the only place where, it seems to me, it's ever really Christmas. When I was a boy I always used to look at the pictures in the books and papers my father got from England, and read the ghost stories and about the yule-logs and things, and the Christmas bells ringing across the snow. There's plenty of snow here, Jack; we only want the bells, my boy,—we only want the bells. I hope she has got a fireside to sit by, Jack, don't you?"

"I do, old man; and I feel sure she has."

"He said he'd sooner kill her than she should marry a man who had lifted a rifle against his beloved South; and when I said if I had known him and his daughter I would have forsworn my birthright rather than have offended him, he only shrugged his shoulders impatiently. How was I to know he and she were living away out there in Virginia when I marched with the boys against the rebs? You talk of beauty, Jack; you should have seen that little Southern girl. My God! And I loved her as if I made up for only knowing her a fortnight by putting a lifetime into those fourteen days. Let's have a drink, Jack."

"We will, old man, we will," said Kerman, rising, and fetching a bottle of brandy from a rough but capacious cupboard; "a jorum, a hot old glass of grog, Tristy; and we'll wish ourselves all the good things of the season."

He hung a kettle over the fire; he brought forth glasses, and a jar of lime juice.

"I've got one of my talking fits on, Jack. It's rather rough on you; but you won't talk, and somebody must keep the game alive on Christmas Eve. Perhaps you'd like a hand at cards, Jack? Let's play for the chest, and the claim, and the Gulch, and the hut, and the whole lot; that'll wake you up."

"No, Tristy; cards will wake me up no more."

"I shall not forget the night when you stood between me and that murdering thief at Sharky Nat's hell. You're

a brave fellow, Jack; you don't know how brave you were that night. You English fellows never do know. You ought to have been laid out that night, Jack."

"I expect I did," said Kerman, measuring the brandy and lime-juice, and pouring it into a jug.

"You saved my life, and how you got off without a knife in your heart or a bullet in your brain, hang me if I know."

"Luck, old man, luck," replied Kerman.

"I'm going to walk about a bit," said Tristram, getting up from his cushions and skins. "I'm going to help you brew the punch."

"That's right," said Kerman. "Bravo! we shall make a merry Christmas of it yet. Get me the sugar, Tristy."

The American staggered a little as he crossed the floor of the cabin, but he opened the cupboard, and struggled with a great jar of sugar, which he managed to place upon the table.

"By the sacred stars and stripes, Jack, I feel ever so much better than I did two hours ago. What a wonderful thing if I should get better!"

"If you should get better? You shall, old man; you shall," said the Englishman, ladling out the sugar, with a wooden spoon, into the jug.

"But supposing, Jack, I should get better only to find that we are buried alive. You don't know what snow means in the Sacramento, my dear friend. You don't know."

Tristram spoke solemnly, and looked into the face of his friend.

"And is that how thou art going to talk just as soon as thou gets a bit better? Thour't a nice Job's comforter, as owd Kester o' the Manor Farm in the Marsh would say."

"I like to hear you do that dialect, Jack, because I know you are happy, thinking of your native land. I should like to see it. I suppose old Secesh Denton did take his daughter across; he said he should in another name, and that they should forget and be forgotten. I was a poor devil then, or I should never have left the track of them; and I only came out to this claim in the hope of getting money enough to find them and make them rich, without them knowing where the gold came from. That was my plan. For I don't think that bitter old cuss had a thousand dollars left out of all he was once worth."

The American had sat down again while he was talking, and Kerman had brewed the grog.

"Now, old man," said Jack, "let's wish each other 'A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.'"

"That's the regular thing," said Kerman, jug in hand. "Now, then, we'll drink to Jane and Caroline, married or single, God bless them!"

Kerman's voice trembled, and Tristram said:

"God bless them!" adding, "married or single. That's got too much bitters, Jack."

"You Americans like bitters," said Kerman, "and I've begun to think they're good. I heard a fellow sing a song at the Footlight Club in London, called "Life's a bumper, filled by Fate," and I often think Fate's given you and me an extra dose of bitters; but it's better to take 'em straight and not complain; so I say married or single. I've every reason to think Jane is married. I know Miss Caroline Denton's happiness is all you care for; and women do get married, Tristy, old man, and there's snow and ice and seas between us and the girls we love. It's true your little lady knows you love her. My great-hearted Lincolnshire lass doesn't know I care much about her—I didn't know it myself before it was too late. Ah, well, it can't be helped. I expect we're a couple of old fools, Tristy. Now I'm jawing away like a Yankee orator—no stopping me once I'm set going, and I wanted you to do all the talking tonight."

He drained his glass, pulled out a pipe, lighted it, sat down, and commenced to smoke.

"I don't think your ideas of love exactly fit in with mine," said Tristram, musingly.

"Have a cigar," said Kerman, "and tell me your ideas."

"Yes, I'll have a smoke. How many cigars have we?"

"Oh, plenty," said Kerman, going to the cupboard and bringing out a handful—"plenty to see us into the spring."

"Plenty, because you leave them all to me. I believe you'd swear you hated brandy, if you thought there wasn't enough for both of us; you're a queer generous old cuss, Jack, that you are."

The American lighted his cigar, and the two men smoked silently for some time, looking into the fire. They pretended not to notice the hissing which the red logs made every now and then, telling of the continued falling of the snow. The firelight threw weird flashes upon the rough

wooden benches, upon the blackened hearth, and up among the multifarious tools, cooking utensils, dried fish, hams, herbs, and kettles, that hung upon the cross-beams beneath the tarred timber roof.

"Look here, Jack," said Tristram, presently. "The better the day, they say, the better the deed. I've made my will. I wish I'd done it before the snow came, because I guess it'll be a long time before Old Chump or any of 'em get up here from the Red Indian bar or the camp down yonder, and I wouldn't wonder if they're not all buried down there before the week's out. I knew what I was about when I prospected this claim, and fixed on Landell's Corner for our brown stone front. Trust an old hand! I guess we're two of the richest men in California; at least, one of us will be, Jack—one of us. Hand out your pens and paper, I'm going to sling ink."

"No, no; sit quiet, and let us talk."

"I thought I was the boss here," said Tristram, with an acted air of authority.

"You're the boss; yes, old man, you're the boss."

"Very well, then, I tell you I'm going to sling ink, old John Bull. I've made my will, and I'm just going to write it out. It's not exactly a will; it's just to show I've no title to the gold nor claim, and that it is all yours, Jack. Pull it out, John Bull, and let us have a look at it."

"I'm going to do what you ask me, Tristy, just to please you and pass the time, that's all, mind. I'd rather you didn't write anything, and I don't want you to look at that dross. It seems to me that we ought to be thinking of something more serious than money matters. I'll bet a trifle there will be no opening the door in the morning."

"Serious! Now there's a crusty old cuss. I never was more serious in my life. Money? Don't despise money."

"If it could buy us a track down to the camp, a highway into the valley, and a free passage through the snow, I would worship it. I have known what it is to have money, as much as a man could want, but not more than a fool can spend."

"I thought you had. I guessed it long ago, but you are as close as a clam; you will never tell a man about it; you're all alike, you English fellows who come out here—you've all got some secret along, and you chew it like a Yank, with an everlasting quid in your mouth."

"Oh, no, it's no secret. I had a heap of money left me,

I was an ignorant, conceited chap, and I went to London with it, to be a gentleman, and I worked at being a gentleman, as hard as you and me have worked together getting these chests filled."

"London!" mused Tristram. "I'll never see your London, Jack."

"You needn't want to, though you'd know how to deal with it. I thought I did, but London's like one of the flash women at Frisco— fine to look at, cruel as——"

"The snow," said the American. "D'ye hear how it hisses in the fire? And I thought I heard the wind; hope not."

"Crueller than the snow, Tristy, because you know what the snow means; it looks you hard and cold in the face, and begins to wall you in and spin your winding-sheet. But London cheats you all the time; it robs you on the score of friendship; it will trample on love, and everything men and women hold dear, for money; and when you've got no money left, it jeers at you and leaves you to starve. One day, my boy, I was rich, the next day I was poor. I went to the docks and bought my passage to New York, gave the agent £100, so that I couldn't touch it, and then I went to have a last look round; I thought I'd try what London was made of. I went to a swell club, which my money got me into, I borrowed £10 of a man, just to pay a billiard debt, hadn't my checque-book about me, I said. He gave it me at once. Then I went to a dear friend, to whom I had rendered many services, told him I was ruined utterly beyond hope, and begged him to lend me £100, He asked me if I thought he was a fool, and turned away. Presently the man who had lent me the £10 came, and hemmed and hah'd, and said, on second thoughts, he wanted that ten-pound note himself; the other friend had split on me. I took the trouble to listen to the conversation of three or four men in the smoke-room. I stood in the shade behind the screen. They said I'd come to grief at last, and served me right. My affected generosity was damned ostentation. I was a pretentious agricultural booby. I hadn't the courage to come out and acknowledge their compliments; I sneaked away through the busy streets, with the lights flashing, went to the docks, and got into my berth. The next day we dropped down the Thames, and I was happy. I'd done my best to make others happy, and I seemed as if I'd just earned my liberty."

"I like to hear you talk," said the American; let me get into my bunk, Jack, and then talk me to sleep; I feel like that; but tell me about the old house where you were reared, with the fire on the hearth, and the dog and that girl, and the old woman."

The American turned into his berth. Kerman trimmed the oil lamp, put another log on the fire, brewed more punch, relighted his pipe, and talked all the time to his friend, who lay dozing and listening like a child soothed by an old wife's story.

"It's all so different in England, old man, everything's finished—the land is under regular cultivation; as for that old kitchen at the Manor Farm, there's nothing like it on this side. At Christmas we used to bring in a great log and pack it on a red coal fire. You could sit in the ingle nook, and there was a great kettle singing on the hob, and Jane would come in and help Kester to make a great spiced bowl, hot and steaming, with dried apples floating on the top; and the farm men would sit round the fire; and then the waits would come and sing about the Babe of Bethlehem and—"

Here Kerman paused. The American was sleeping calm and still. Kerman went to the door. The entrance to the cabin was half blocked up with snow. A bank of it three or four feet high fell in upon him. He covered Decker up to protect him from the wind, and then attacked the snow with a shovel. He now wished that they had engaged men to help them in the Gulch, or given some of the miners at Nipper's Creek a share of the claim, so that they might have had neighbors to help them in this battle with winter. It was hard work, one spade against a world of snow. But the English miner worked with a will, until long after midnight; and daylight brought ample evidence of the hard necessity of his labors.

CHAPTER II.

USELESS TREASURES.

But the daylight brought no change in the aspect of nature. The snow continued to fall, and Kerman renewed his attack upon it, keeping a clear space in front of the hut. Hope is courage, and Kerman put the strength of both into his shovel.

"It can't go on snowing forever," he said; "and we have plenty to eat and drink."

"But if the wind gets up the snow will drift, and, all of a sudden, we may have a mountain upon us," said Tristarm.

The two men were having breakfast, and it was Christmas Day,

"Well, we can only die once, Tristy," said Kerman.

"We don't want to die yet," said the invalid.

"Why, last night you were going to square up with Crossbones almost at once."

"Yes; it was one of my bad days, but I was quite right about the will, and while you've been shovelling at the snow, like your friend, Mrs. Partington, with the mop at the sea, I've just written it down."

He took from a pocket-book a sheet of note paper, and read to Kerman his last will and testament, which gave to Kerman the entire claim of Decker's Gulch, making him the vendor to the San Francisco Company, and stating that all the gold in the chest at their hut belonged to the same man, who had got most of it with his own hands. There was only one condition: Kerman was to go to England, find out old Secesh Denton, and convey to him, in some way that would not wound his pride, the value of at least one-third of the property.

"I'll tell you how you'll do that, Jack. You'll go to New York, and get hold of a clever lawyer, a judge. His name is Clinch; you'll easily find him. He is a square, downright fellow. He knows Denton. You'll tell Clinch that he's got to make the fiery old reb, believe that the government has restored to him in money a part of what they

stole from him. That will satisfy his pride. You'll go to one of those jewelry stores, and buy something for her, with my name engraved on it, and if she's married, see her husband, ask him to let her wear it. And, if the old man is dead,—I've thought it all out, you see, like a lawyer,—why, the money is hers. You'll manage that; and if anybody has behaved cruelly to her, or deceived her, or done her a wrong, you'll avenge her for me."

"How do you mean, Tristram?"

"One day in the summer—the very day you struck that lode which has made you so rich, I was sitting out by the corner, wondering why the Almighty should have given all the beauty of the earth to the Indian, and, having done so, why he should let us come and tear it up for gold, when I saw a face look out at me from the 'brush' that covers that side of the mountain. It was her face, and it looked so sad and mournful that the tears came into my eyes as I gazed upon it. The reality of it was so intense, that I did not doubt but Caroline was there before me. I went towards her. It was only a face, and it faded away as I approached it. That was an appeal for help. It was not death. She would not come then, because she would know there would be two deaths if she did. It was poverty. It meant that we were to work at the vein we had discovered. It meant that the old man's money had run out, and that I should be quick and get rich and go to his aid. That is how I read it. And it meant more; it signified that she was true to me, that I might still hope; and so, Jack, while you were thinking me a money-grubber, a keen, selfish Yank after gold, I was working for her."

"And killing yourself, as I have told you often enough."

"No, no, the seeds of my disease were laid in long ago, and I wasn't going to let you do all the work. I was too selfish not to want to feel that I, having won some of the money, had the right to give it away."

"Why, isn't the claim yours? Was it not yours from the first? And am I anything else but an interloper?"

"Bear with me, Jack. I want to tell you everything, so that you will be well posted if we should be separated. Do you know why I say 'if,' this morning?"

"To make up for being so contrary about it last night."

"No! I dreamt this morning—and I believe in morning dreams—that I was getting well, and that the doctor, up from the Indian bar, came and said I was wanted in

London, and that he laughed at me when I said I couldn't travel so far, and I woke with his last words in my ear—'You'll go to that there London!' he said,—you know his rough, uneducated style,—'you'll go to that infernal Babylon, and have a rare old time.'"

"Good for old Bolus," said Kerman; "and I believe him."

"Then we understand each other?"

"Hope so."

"But you think I am strange, and your practical mind don't sympathize with visions and dreams."

"I don't know; I never had much experience of them, but a year or two among these mountains would make me a believer in spirits and the rest, there is something so solemn in the look of the world about here."

"Hush, a moment."

Decker went to a small cupboard in a corner of the room. Three drinking glasses placed in an inverted position upon one of the shelves were carefully examined. He closed the cupboard.

"I knew it," he said.

"Your weather-glasses are at work, eh?" said Kerman, with a smile.

"It's an old test. Inverted glasses on a shelf placed like that foretell storms of wind. They sound an alarm. On the coast where I was brought up it was infallible. We are going to have a storm of wind."

Kerman went to the door. The snow had ceased to fall. The sun was getting up behind them. A grey mist brooded over the vast expanse of hill and dale. The sun seemed to dwell upon it. A fog-bow appeared in the sky; and beneath it the form of a cross.

"Come here, Decker, quick!" cried Kerman.

Decker hurried to the door.

"What's that?"

"A phenomenon peculiar to mountainous countries. It is common in the Arctic regions and in the Alps. In the Hartz they see spectres. But I've never seen the figure of a cross before."

As he spoke, the phenomenon disappeared. Kerman looked anxiously at Decker.

"What's the meaning of it?"

"It's an omen."

"Of what?"

"That God will not desert us. It is Christmas Day. He sends us the great sign-manual of His goodness, the Cross of Christ."

The face of the American lighted up as he spoke with a sublime expression of tenderness and hope.

Kerman bent his head reverently.

"Let us go in, Jack, and pray. Don't let us be ashamed of our feelings; don't let us be afraid to speak to God in each other's hearing. We shall want His aid before long. Your shovel will be no good against a tempest of wind."

They re-entered the hut.

"You've upset me, Decker. I feel as if some calamity was about to fall upon us."

"Why, you look frightened, Jack."

"I am frightened."

"It is strangely quiet, is it not?—no sounds of life, not even an echo from the Indian bar, not a sound from Nipper's Creek. It may be that we are the only living people this side the Gulch. Did you notice that part of the mountain. where I saw her face in the summer, had slipped away?"

"No; how do you mean slipped?"

"Jerked right away into the valley; Nipper's Creek is below there. Boss Maggs and his crew are down on the river, I shouldn't wonder, under ten thousand tons of rock and snow."

"And this is Christmas Day," said Kerman.

"Shut your eyes, Jack, if you're ashamed to be a man, and confess yourself less than Him who sent the bow and the cross, and say your prayers to yourself."

Decker knelt by a chair. Kerman went out into the open air, and looked in the direction of the mountain of which Decker had spoken. The whole side of the ridge appeared as if it had given way. It had left a dark patch behind, and in the valley below there was no longer any trace of Nipper's Creek.

"Good Lord, have mercy upon them!" exclaimed Kerman.

That was all the prayer he said.

"Maggs and his lot are done for," he said, as he went back into the hut.

Decker had dragged out before the fire the chest of gold.

"I thought you were going to pray to God, and I find you're worshipping the devil," said Kerman.

"This is not the devil."

"Put it away, Tristy. I hate it."

"Why?"

"Those fellows would have been alive now, but for this infernal thirst of gold."

"No; they might have been killed trying to rescue drowning men at sea. No, Jack, gold is God, if you use it well."

"Don't be profane. Just now I felt a certain amount of security because you could pray, and I was awkward at it, and now you are insulting God, for didn't the heathens set up a golden calf instead of him?"

"Nonsense, Jack. He planted gold for us to find, and He gives it to some men without taxing head or heart to show His contempt for it. When rightly used, He blesses it; when wrongfully dealt with, it carries a curse."

Decker paused as he spoke, and, taking up a piece of gold larger than the others, he said,—

"Why, Jack, there's blood upon this; and on this!"

CHAPTER III.

FIGHTING THE TEMPEST.

KERMAN took the ore from Decker's hands. "It is not blood," he said. He wiped it upon his coat-sleeve. "It is the redness of the earth where we got it."

"Yes, I see," said Decker, taking it from his companion, and dropping it among the rest in the locker.

"Your manner is very strange to-day, Decker; put the stuff away."

"I have been thinking of our riches ever since daylight."

"Our poverty, you mean," said Kerman, as he commenced to clear away the remains of their breakfast.

"Poverty," said Decker, smiling; "do you know how rich we are?"

"I know how poor we are," said Kerman.

"I tell you, man, we are wealthy beyond description; rich enough to buy Monte Cristo's cavern of gems, if there ever was such a place."

"I never heard of it," said Kerman, putting away the last article of crockeryware which formed their breakfast service.

"Did you ever read about it?'

Never.

"Ah, Jack, you have many pleasures to come."

"I hope so."

"Do you know that our shares in the gold of Decker's Gulch, and the veins which belong to it for two miles round, may yield us fifty thousand dollars a week? We are the possessors of an El Dorado. Do you know that we have found the Philosopher's Stone? I don't think you realize it old man."

Kerman pulled out his pipe, filled it, lighted it, and commenced to smoke.

"If I die, Kerman, you will be one of the richest men in the world. Think of it, man! You will be a Midas—a Crœsus; you will possess the purse of Fortunatus."

"Boss Maggs had a pretty good pile of gold in his bunk yesterday," said Kerman.

"Boss Maggs!" exclaimed Decker, impatiently. "Why you don't think this chest of gold bears any comparison to what we've got? You've told me of your English farmers showing samples of their grain in little bags. This trifle of ore, Jack, is only a specimen of the bulk. You should have seen the face of the San Francisco men when I showed them one lump of it! Why in a few months from now, Jack, the country for miles round our property will swarm with prospectors and miners seeking for a mere streak of the gold we have got in layers."

"Yes, I understand that you have made your fortune," said Kerman, "and that I have enough to enable me to begin my genteel studies again with a good balance."

Kerman never could speak of his London experiences without a sneer. He emphasised the word genteel with a contemptuous wave of his hand.

"You can't be a true gentleman without having read 'Monte Christo,'" said Decker, smiling; "and you certainly will never understand the power of money without studying it."

"Is it a work on fashion, etiquette, banking, or what?"

"On all three," replied Decker, in a patronizing manner, which he sometimes assumed towards his companion.

"If Maggs had read it, would he have been alive to-day?"

"Not unless he had had as good a partner as you have, then he might."

"How's that?"

"Maggs didn't understand the first principle of mining, where to fix your quarters. Now we are perched in the safest nook of the whole region."

"Yes, we are perched," said Kerman. "That's just it."

"Well?"

"Why, anything like that landslip which has settled Maggs's lot would wipe us out; we shouldn't have time to say good-by."

"Bah! the fog bow has unnerved you, Jack."

"It has," said Kerman; "and I'll tell you what it is, dear boy: I can't sit here any longer and see you finger that infernal dross; put it away."

He put down his pipe, and laid his hand upon the lid of the chest, saying, "Don't you know this is Christmas Day? You seem to have forgotten it all in a few minutes. Just now you were praying, and now you are selling your soul to the devil."

Decker rose to his feet, and allowed Kerman to close the lid and drag the locker into its accustomed place.

"There, now sit down, and let us talk."

"All right, old man. You are right; when I begin fingering the gold it changes me—it seems to fire my blood. Jack, she shall walk on it; she shall have golden staircases; her house shall be a house of jewels. She shall have silks from India, furs from Russia, diamonds that have been cut for the queens of Europe, gems from the temples of Eastern gods."

Kerman had twice seen Decker under the morbid influence of this mad passion of gold and love. Once before the young man had worked himself up into a wild paroxysm, in which he had alternately prayed and cursed. The unexcitable Englishman thought it best to resist this craze by prosaic remarks, or phlegmatic disregard of Decker's ravings.

"Supposing she's married, like my Jane?" he said.

"I'll buy him," replied Decker, quickly.

"Buy him?" observed Kerman. "That's a queer idea."

"Yes," said Decker, seating himself cross-legged upon a

rude wooden chair, having his arms on the back, resting his chin upon his arms, and looking straight at Kerman, "I'll buy her, if necessary. If I live, nothing shall separate us."

"You can't buy people, Decker."

"Money can buy everything and everybody."

"Not an honest woman's love."

"Something so much like it that you can't tell the difference."

"But supposing she is married, and loves her husband?"

"She couldn't love him."

"But if he refused to give her up?"

Decker stood up to emphasize what he was going to say. "I'd kill him!" he exclaimed; "I'd shoot him."

"What, for loving a woman whom you couldn't resist yourself?"

"Kerman, I would shoot him," said Decker, his eyes flashing, his frame trembling.

"And then I should lose my friend and partner," said Kerman, smiling, and pretending to treat the whole matter lightly, and as if Decker was joking.

"How, Jack, how?"

"They'd hang you."

"Who would?"

"A judge and jury."

"What! hang a man with his hands full of gold? Put away one of the richest men in the world?"

Decker laughed derisively at the bare suggestion of such a disregard of the influence of money.

"By the Lord, Decker, they'd hang you in England if you owned all the gold mines in the earth! Damme, I think they'd hang you all the more on that account."

"Would they? Then I don't think much of your civilization."

"You're not in earnest, Decker?"

"I am."

"What! do you call it a proper use of money to bribe Justice?"

"Why, certainly, if Justice stands between you and the woman of your choice. To have gold, Jack, is to have the master-key. Listen, old friend, I never was more serious in my life. I'm going to do whatever I please, if I live. If I die, the talisman is yours and hers. I would coin my heart for that woman, pawn my hopes of heaven, and when I say

that, you can understand what it means, for you have seen me pray. Do you know why my soul is in such a whirl to-day?"

"No."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes."

"I am better. That is one reason. My cough has not troubled me for four-and-twenty hours. I believe I am going to recover. And I am suffering from remorse." He paused and sighed.

"Well?" said Kerman.

"I ought never to have left her. I ought to have followed in her footsteps, and watched and waited. By this time she might have been mine."

"She may be yet."

"Another obstacle is growing up between us now that I am getting better."

"What obstacle?"

"Do you hear the wind?"

A low moan sounded far away in the distance. Again the snow hissed on the burning logs.

"That," said Decker, pointing to the fire, and alluding to the snow, "and that," nodding his head towards the door, "the wind more particularly."

"I thought you didn't care for one or the other."

"I blame myself for letting her go," he replied, as if speaking to himself. "I wasn't selfish enough. Love is selfish—real, true, absorbing love. Its yearnings are selfish as the grave. Mine was not love. I should have taken her from her father. I could have done so. If she had been mine, only for a week, and we had then died, that would have been life. Yesterday, I had given her up. To-day, I am strong. God has given me new life, and with it gold that opens all doors, clears all paths, commands everything except the tempest. And it seems as if He was about to snatch away the cup just as I am thinking of being able to raise it to my lips. There! That's what I mean, Jack, I'm not so mad as you think me."

He took a cigar from his jacket pocket, sat down, and commenced to smoke.

"Yes, that wind isn't a comfortable visitor," remarked Kerman, reflectively; "and the snow's come on again. I must tackle it just now. What bothers me most, Tristy,

is the weight of it that's accumulating on the top of the hut."

"Oh, that'll slip away; don't bother about that. What we've got to fear is the wind driving a drift upon us. You can get at the wood-stack still for the fire?"

"Yes; I've kept that clear so far."

"Things might have been worse. We don't suffer much from the cold, and we've plenty of provisions. In the Arctic regions you have to chop your liquor with a hatchet, and boil it before you drink it; your beard freezes, and is hung with icicles; and if you take up your gun thoughtlessly, without several gloves on your hands, the skin peels off upon the weapon. We are saved all that."

"Yes," said Kerman, "there's always a deeper hole than the one you're in."

He went to the door as if to answer the knock of a visitor. It was the wind that shook it. He opened it. A cloud of snow entered, driven by a gust of wind.

Darkness fell upon the hut.

"And it is only twelve o'clock," said Decker.

"We shan't forget this Christmas Day in a hurry, Tristy," said Kerman, sorrowfully.

"I think we shall, Jack, old man," replied Decker now as much depressed as he had previously been excited.

"There's nothing to be done?" said Kerman, in a tone of inquiry.

"It might be as well to board up the window," said Decker. "That was nothing you heard just now, only the wind shovelling the snow off the roof; our fire has warmed the eaves. We've plenty of candles, that's a comfort."

Kerman lighted two as he spoke.

"I'm going to open the door again," said Kerman. "I fancy that was only a strong gust of wind, and we must have some wood in."

He opened the door. The snow came in again, but with much less force. Kerman went out. Half blinded he crawled to the wood-stack, which he had hitherto kept tolerably free from the snow. He dragged a few logs out and reappeared, white and shivering. His return changed the atmosphere of the hut. His breath was like smoke. He had not properly refastened the door. The wind banged it open, and a white column came whirling in. There was a snowstorm on the very hearth. Decker dashed at the door and shut it. Neither of the men spoke for some time.

The wind howled. Kerman heaped the logs upon the fire.

"Let's drink old Father Christmas's health, Decker," said Kerman, presently, producing a bottle of brandy; perhaps he'll like it, and not be so rough on us."

"All right, Jack."

"They'd call this seasonable weather in England."

"I wish it was next week, Jack."

"Why?"

"We shall be either dead or doing well next week."

"Here's to you, Father Christmas!" said Kerman; "and I hope you won't smother us with your seasonable attentions, most worthy monarch!"

"Good," said Decker, raising his glass. "Don't forget us, old Santa Claus. It doesn' look as if there were any inhabitants hereabouts; but there are, dear old boss, and if we get out of this, there will be no end to the presents we'll make in your honor!"

Decker tossed off the contents of his glass. The wind came down the chimney and drove the smoke all over the place.

"Neither your Father Christmas nor my Santa Claus appears to care much about us, Jack," said Decker, "and it doesn't seem much good praying just at present. Nature's a curious institution, Kerman. It came into my mind, this minute, the story of the parson, who, in a storm at sea, was told by the captain all had been done that was possible, and they must now trust in Providence. "Mercy on us," exclaimed the minister, "and are we reduced to that?"

"I don't think it's just the time, Tristy, to be humorous," said Kerman, as he commenced to nail a board over the window, which had long since ceased to exhibit any view to the eye except a blockade of snow.

"No, it isn't, but human nature is a sassy critter, as my old colonel used to say. I remember falling into a rebel ambuscade in Virginia, and felt for certain my time was come, and the only thought that crossed my mind was a sense of satisfaction that I had at least lived long enough to thrash a bummer who used to worry me around when we were schoolfellows. I have been pretty near the end of the street more than once or twice, Kerman; but I was never scared before now. If this weather keeps on for four and twenty hours we are gone coons!"

They sat and talked until dinner-time. They ate heartily and drank hot grog. They talked of their lives—they

talked of death. Kerman was foiled in his second attempt to bring in wood. A bank of snow seemed to fall upon him. The wind brought the snow in its arms, and flung it into the corner where the cabin was "perched." When the door was at last shut again, the snow drove in through the crevice at the bottom. Kerman packed the crevice with a rug.

Night brought the two men face to face with death.

Kerman discovered that the roof nearest the mountain which hitherto had seemed to protect them, was bulging and giving way. He made an effort to prop it. The wind had lifted a bank of snow from an adjacent ledge, and dropped it upon the hut. At midnight, in spite of every effort to prop it, two of the timbers fell in with a crash, burying the store-cupboard with snow, and extinguishing the lights. The snow seemed to come in with a thud, as if a dead body had been thrown in upon them. The fire leaped up as the candles were extinguished, showing the wreck in all its cold horror. The wind came in fierce and shrill through the roof with fresh accumulations of snow.

"If we stay here, Jack, we shall be buried alive," said Decker.

"We can't get out," Kerman replied calmly; "the joists and jambs have settled down upon the door. A giant couldn't open it."

"There's the window," said Decker, in a hoarse whisper.

"And the snow grave beneath it," Kerman replied.

The Lincolnshire squire filled his pipe and sat down by the fire, which cast warm gleams upon the increasing bank of snow that was filling up one side of the hut.

"Can you smoke at such a time as this?" asked Decker, reprovingly.

"Yes; but it's all I can do."

"If the other part of the roof goes, it's all over with us."

"Yes, that would put my pipe out; but I don't think it will go. The fall at the back has relieved the top of half the weight of snow that rested on it."

As he spoke a sudden moan was heard high up in the hills, and with it came a crashing blow upon the cabin. It trembled, and all in a moment there was no longer any fire, and Kerman found himself struggling beneath the falling timbers and suffocating snow. With a tremendous effort he cleared his head of the weight that had borne him down. He could not see, but he could breathe. There was a voice

as of thunder in his ears. He thought he heard the wreck of the cabin hurled down into the valley, and he wondered that he remained stationary. The snow fell upon his face. He was afraid to speak. The wind moaned. It seemed to pelt him with snow. He tried to move his arms—one of them was free. He rested it on the snow as a lever for his body. Fearful to move, he was nevertheless anxious to know if he could. He could not. When he tried to speak, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He moistened his lips with snow. Presently he called out, "Decker! Decker!"

It was like speaking in a vault. The sound of his voice seemed to come back upon him.

"Decker! Tristram Decker!" he cried.

The only answer was a dead, solemn, chilling silence. Even the mockery of an echo was denied to the man. And the snow kept falling as if bent on burying him alive secretly. Some such thought occurred to the despairing victim of the storm.

"Decker!" he shouted, and with a desperate effort he freed both arms and flung them wildly upwards, as a drowning man in the sea.

Then the foundations of the earth seemed to give way, and he was carried down, down, into the lower darkness of the night, as if the wind had taken him into its arms to dash him headlong into eternity.

A sudden obstruction impeded their flight. All was still again, except the dull moaning of the storm as it swept down the valley in a chill whirl of death, the snow following silently in its wake, to cover-up and hide the horrors of Nature's grim and ruthless invasion.

CHAPTER IV.

"FACES IN THE FIRE."

The snow fell steadily upon Marylebone, upon Miss Weaver's Retreat in the great thoroughfare of the borough, and upon the business premises of Brayford & Co., Circularizers and Advertising Agents, in the once famous High

Street of this division of the great city. But it melted nearly as quickly as it fell, converting the roads into soft, black mud, and making the pavements wet and greasy, as if the snow had been soot instead of white rain.

It was Christmas Day. The shops were closed, with the exception of the fruiterers and the confectioners, which were patronized chiefly by shivering children, who ran to and fro with oranges and nuts, to the envy of other little ones, who, tucking their red arms underneath their gray pinafores, planted themselves in front of the tempting stores, and reckoned up what they hoped to buy on Boxing Day. Beneath the several archways of the locality a few men, some of them in their Sunday clothes, stood smoking in groups, now and then stamping their feet for warmth. The two or three bells in the adjacent church played a dirge-like invitation to prayer. In the stables of a local inn, an eccentric chanticleer persisted in continuing his somewhat tardy proclamations of the morn, as if he were anxious to make up for the lateness of his announcement by the vigor of his salutations. If you had listened to him, you would have been able to picture him in your mind, strutting back into his stable every now and then to shake his feathers free from the clammy snow, and returning to his duty with renewed determination. A dirty mist settled down upon each end of the street, and through it, in a hoarse kind of tintinabulary whisper, came the sound of distant bells chiming and ringing, but the local "Bang-bang-bang" of the Marylebone bells sat heavily upon all competitors except chanticleer, who deliberately waited to get in his cry between the pauses of the dull but emphatic call to prayers. The air was raw and dirty, for the smoke of the locality was more or less mixed up in the sluggish current of it that oscillated between the banks of mist that shut in the street, which was once the principal part of the village of Marylebone, with its Royal Palace, where Christmas had been wont to come hale and hearty with merry-making and wassail.

Almost in the centre of the street, over the back premises of Moses Aaron's Emporium of Antiquities and China, Mr. Harry Brayford had established himself in his new and somewhat mysterious line of business. To Mr. Aaron's emporium there were two entrances, one in front, another at the side, which a neighboring furniture-broker had squeezed into the smallest possible dimensions. Moses

Aaron, through the interposition of his wife, had consented to the side entrance being partially given up to Mr. Brayford, who was described upon the door in white letters as "Brayford & Co., Circularizers and Advertising Agents—Ring the bell on the right." If you had rung that particular bell, and been admitted into the narrow passage on this Christmas Day of our history, you might have been a spectator of an interesting scene. You would have been received by a tidy little Jewish girl, who would have shown you a set of white teeth, and said, "Yes. sir, Mr. Brayford is in, but he's just going to have his dinner. Second floor, first turn on the right." You would have threaded your way through passages of antiquities and china, and past rooms choked with furniture, suits of armor, stuffed birds, old oak chests, oil paintings hung awry, and ancient swords leaning for support against matchlocks from the battle of Worcester, and battle-axes which had been wielded by Norman knights. Then you would have come to a blank space on the wall, with the direction, "Brayford & Co.—First door on the left." Here you would have wiped your boots on a cocoa-nut mat, and knocked at a knocker with a demon's head in bronze and wings of flaming brass, which bore evidence of daily polishing. Mr. Brayford was never tired of telling a certain infant, that would coo and laugh at him without understanding a word he said, all about this knocker. It had been on the chapter-house door of a famous cathedral, and every time it heard the clock strike twelve it had flapped its wings and raised the knocker itself. On this occasion you would have lifted the brazen knocker yourself, and, in response to your summons, a cheery voice would have said, "Come in, if you're fat; if you're lean you'll do for the cat." Mr. Brayford was always ransacking his memory for some childish saying of his old days to please one or the other of his two children, as he called little Willie and the Wonner.

If you had elected to accept Mr. Brayford's nursery challenge on this Christmas Day, trusting to the plumpness of your anatomy, you would have seen a curious picture of London life. Mr. H. Brayford, in a faded velvet coat and pink slippers, was sitting at the head of a square table, playing the host to three other persons. Opposite to him, and with her back to a red glowing fire, was Mrs. Gardner, in a dark merino dress, with a white collar round her throat, her hair gathered up into a massive plait behind.

Occupying another side of the table was little Willie, propped up in a high child's chair, and facing the Wonner, whose vacant eyes were fixed upon the Christmas pudding which his honored though eccentric chief was about to carve.

"Second act, Mrs. Gardner," said Brayford; "that's what I call it, and a good act too; act three will be dessert and snapdragon. Do you have snapdragon in America?"

The host did not wait for an answer, but he handed a slice of pudding to the Wonner.

"For the lady, sir, for the lady," said the host, whereupon the Wonner blinked and smiled, and shuffled the plate in front of Mrs. Gardner.

"That's it," said Brayford; "ladies first, always, Mr. W., then the infants."

He cut up a slice into several pieces, and handed it to little Willie, who attacked it at once with a real silver spoon, lent for the purpose by Mrs. Aaron.

"Christmas comes but once a year," said Brayford, cutting another slice of pudding for the Wonner, "and when it comes it brings good cheer: roast beef and mince-pie, which nobody likes so well as I. There, Mr. W., bend your great mind upon that."

The Wonner looked at Mrs. Gardner, as much as to say, "Ain't he a humorist?" And then, nodding in a friendly way to little Willie, he commenced to pay attention to the pudding.

"If the sauce is not strong enough, have a little brandy to it—neat—Mrs. Gardner. Do, now; let me assist you."

"No, thank you; it is very good indeed," replied Mrs. Gardner.

"Extraordinary world this, madam," said Mr. Brayford, "is it not? Here is Mrs. Moses Aaron, who is a Jewess—Sarah Aaron is her name, Jerusalem is her nation, London is her dwelling-place, antiquities her vocation; and yet here she makes us a Christian plum-pudding on the day that we malign her race, and she put in the raisins and the lemon-peel as religiously as if she'd been brought up with a silver cross in her mouth, and had never heard of Judas Iscariot or Pontius his Pilate. Ah, Mrs. Gardner, we never know what the heart is by the religion it professes! I declare if I had a proper nose for the part I'd leave the Church and become a Jew. I'm in love with the whole fraternity."

Mrs. Gardner smiled, and by a look directed Mr. Brayford's attention to little Willie, who, as was his wont towards the conclusion of dinner, had leaned back in his chair and fallen asleep.

"'Tired nature's sweet restorer,'" said Brayford, deprecating with his raised finger any other interference with the child but his own. "He, like the world, his ready visit pays where pudding paves the way."

Then he lifted little Willie carefully out of his chair, and handed him over to Mrs. Gardner, who carried the child into an adjacent room, and presently returned; while Mrs. Aaron herself came in, removed the pudding, and placed upon the table a decanter of port wine, a flask of brandy, a dish of almonds and raisins, and a plate of sliced oranges.

"Thank you, Mrs. Aaron; you are the kindest woman in the world," said Brayford.

"Not a bit of it," said the woman, "there's many as is kinder."

"To think that there should be persons calling themselves Christians who look down upon Jews! Why, these Aarons, bless you, have plenty of money. Mrs. A. has no need to wait on us, but she does it, I believe, out of pure kindness," said the host, as Mrs. Aaron left the room, which she did as humbly as if she lived by letting the back premises, for far less than they were worth, to her husband as warehouses.

"She is very good," said Mrs. Gardner

"And all because I was kind, she says, to her boy, who is dead; not that I knew him when living, but I built his last resting-place, and I sat and comforted the poor old lady on the day of the funeral, and felt sorry to see her grieving, and I wrote her a neat epitaph on my own principle, which I have explained before, only I did this in real earnest; and that's how I came to have such comfortable premises for my new business, and there is no end to the dear soul's gratitude. She has come to regard me at last as an old friend of her boy, though my only acquaintance with him was through his coffin-plate and his gravestone."

The Wonner nodded and laughed.

"That's right, Mr. W., enjoy yourself. Capital joke, wasn't it?"

Mr. W. leaned back in his chair, with an orange in one hand and an almond in the other, and chuckled immensely.

"It doesn't matter to have a vacant head if your heart's all right—eh, Mr. W.?"

"He is so clever," said Mr. W. to himself, and laying down his almonds and orange to rub his hands.

"Now, Mrs, Gardner, one glass of port, madam, and I am going to give you a toast; fill your glass, Mr. W."

"So very clever," said Mr. W., pushing his glass towards Mr. Brayford.

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to loved ones away and those who are here," said Brayford; "more particularly referring, Mrs. Gardner, to Mr. John Kerman and to Mr. Tristram Decker, and to us four—yourself, and little Willie, and Brayford & Co."

Then, as Mr. Brayford raised his glass to his lips, Mr. W. drank.

"Fancy the Wonner for a Company. Doesn't it amuse you, madam? I often laugh at the idea of it when I'm making out a bill—"To forty thousand at one shilling a thousand, two pounds;" or, replying to an application—"Please quote price for thirteen insertions, enclosed advertisement, Brayford & Co."

Mr. Brayford prided himself on being the inventor of what he called professional circularization. When Monolith Cottage and its business association came to an end, Mr. Brayford's principal trouble was the Wonner, and how that gentle imbecile was to live. The old pensioner had been in the habit of addressing circulars to the families of all the parties mentioned in the obituary advertisements of a morning paper, and the only established idea in the Wonner's mind was the absolute necessity to the world at large that he should continue in this occupation. When for a few days he was compelled to leave it off, he labored under the belief that Brayford was playing some practical joke upon him. The first day he pretended to enjoy it, the second day he resented it, and the third he broke into lamentations. Brayford having no use for Mr. W.'s labors in the old direction, conceived the idea of addressing other people's circulars, and thus sprang up a business which now provides many a humble home with food. Companies' prospectuses, tradesmen's circulars, pamphlets, all kinds of announcements, are folded, addressed, and stamped at so much per thousand, and Mr. Brayford's first ten shillings, after his downfall, were earned by himself and his ancient clerk from a city printer. Mr. W., however,

still continued to address fifty envelopes per day from the obituary advertisements, which, after some trouble, Mr. Brayford had induced a once rival firm of mural masons to accept at a very low, though remunerative figure. It was while he was in search of Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson, in the hope of obtaining orders to address his company prospectuses, that Mr. Brayford had come to the rescue of Mrs. Gardner and her child, whom he had brought to Mrs. Aaron, not, however, without some resistance on the part of the fugitive. When Mrs. Gardner had told her story to Mrs. Aaron, that childless old lady offered her a room, and with the business instinct of her race had remarked "there need be no obligation, for if the young woman can write a good hand, she may earn her living by addressing envelopes for Mr. Brayford;" and so it had come to pass that Mrs. Gardner and her child were inmates of the Emporium, the fugitive accepting the position of an assistant in the circularization department of the firm of Brayford & Co. who had recently added to their other responsibilities the business of an advertising agency, as notified in a leading journal—"Brayford & Co., High Street, Marylebone, insert advertisements and enter into contracts for the same in all English newspapers; estimates given." He had demonstrated to Mr. Moses Aaron the advantages of advertising, by creating a run on cheap stuffed birds, through an announcement he had drawn up, with a poetic quotation in the middle of it and a surprising climax at the close, the spirit of which he presented "free, gratis, and for nothing," to professional dramatists. One of the Footlighters, who had been many times indebted to Brayford for a dinner, identified the address of Brayford & Co. and Moses Aaron, and in a so-called satirical journal, which was not entitled *Black Mail*, he congratulated Mr. Aaron upon the possession of a poet whose poverty, he heard, was sufficiently keen to qualify him for the divine afflatus said to come best to an empty stomach. The men who were under obligations to Brayford revenged themselves upon him most thoroughly; but as the author of the three-act epitaph rarely saw them, or the elegant and refined journals under whose shadows they picked something more than holes in honest reputations, they did not much disturb the peace of mind of their former patron. Mr. Brayford was quite happy. He earned just enough to enable him to live, and give food and

freedom to Mrs. Gardner and little Willie. These additional mouths to feed had not only brought him increased business, but Mrs. Gardner's history was to him a source of never-ending romance. He had discovered Mrs. Gardner's husband or betrayer in Tom Sleaford; he had shown her the corner house in Fitzroy Square; he had shown her Emily Sleaford's villa in St. John's Wood; he had shown her the West End Bank of Deposit in Baker Street; he had told her their histories; and, on this Christmas Day, while Tristram Decker and John Kerman were in peril between the demon Gold and the despot Winter, Harry Brayford had strange news to communicate to Mrs. Gardner, of especial interest to one if not both of these men whom we have just left at the mercy of the storm.

"You said you were going to church, Mr. W.," remarked Brayford, when the white-haired clerk had signified that he had finished dining; "no snapdragon until after tea, when little Willie's awake."

Mr. W. chuckled and rose to his feet. "Yes, yes," he said, nodding, "always church at Christmas. He is so clever, so very clever."

"Come straight back," said Brayford.

"Yes, straight as I can; yes, yes," replied Mr. W.

"Straight as you can? why, you've not had much port, you dear old sinner," said Brayford. "Straight as you can! I'll talk to you! There was an old gent of London, he thought his peace it was undone, so he went off to church, left his friend in the lurch, and said that was the fashion of London."

"Very good," said Mr. W., "clever and good, and so say all of us, Amen;" with which remark Mr. W. took a cloak and staff from a peg behind the door, and trotted out of the room.

"Now, Mrs. Gardner, you still promise to be guided by me, don't you?"

"Yes, Mr. Brayford, you are as wise as you are kind."

"No, don't say that; rather that I am not quite such a fool as I look; I won't pretend to go beyond that."

"I can never thank you enough for all you have done for me."

"Don't thank me; I don't deserve it; I have done nothing; but I want to tell you that I have come to the conclusion you were not married in London. None of the

registry offices we have found are at all like the one you remember, and I have got it right fast in my mind that he never brought you to town. He knew you were a stranger, and, either for the purpose of duping you, or for what reason it doesn't matter now, he has taken you to Bristol, Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester, or some large city, and called it London. What do you think of that idea?"

"In a misty kind of fashion that thought has come into my head more than once."

"We are on the right track then at last," said Brayford, quickly. "The shadow of that idea falling on your mind is enough to convince me. That's settled. We will study the map, and visit the nearest large city. I don't know how we shall do it, but it must be done."

Brayford stirred the fire, and asked Mrs. Gardner to turn her chair round upon the hearth. The two then sat before the fire, Brayford on his side, Mrs. Gardner on hers. The so-called "gay dog," who had written comic songs, and subscribed for an entire ballet company to have a Christmas dinner several years ago, was as respectful to the Southern woman as the humble subject of a queen might have been to his sovereign; and yet his homage was devoid of the ostentation of humility. Mrs. Gardner found him quite companionable. He exaggerated his age in order that not even the wildest thought of suspicion anent the proprieties should make her feel uncomfortable. He might have spared himself any trouble on that account, for his good, true heart shone straight through his face, and illuminated all his conduct in Mrs. Gardner's eyes. She would never go out alone. Mrs. Aaron had been her companion here and there, in little shopping expeditions, but Mr. Brayford had shown her London in its splendor and in its rags, in its kindliness and its cruelty. They had stood together outside theatres on grand nights; they had seen Hyde Park in the season; they had been all through Marylebone Workhouse to look for an old man once in the employment of Brayford, who had procured him a situation as sub-porter at a cemetery; they had wandered through St. Giles's that they might see people worse off than themselves; they had stood opposite a large house in Baker Street, where Mrs. Gardner had clung to Brayford's arm in terror when he said, "That's his father's new swindle, the West-End Bank of Deposit; one day they will drag him out of that to gaol." She could never be induced to

go into the Marylebone Road if she knew it. Her only fear in life was that Miss Weaver might have her seized and locked up, more especially as the police had issued a notice offering a reward for her discovery, in order to complete the prosecution of Irish Moll. Brayford told her that this official interest in her would soon be at an end, and he illustrated his views by stories of murders which had excited London for a week or two, to be utterly forgotten for some new sensation. "London doesn't remember anything long, and it's astonishing how few murders they ever find out," he said. But Mrs. Gardner was firm in her fear of "The Retreat," and in her resolve never to go outside High Street alone, or allow little Willie to go beyond her immediate sight.

The winter twilight fell dark and dirty upon the back windows of the Emporium as Brayford and Mrs. Gardner sat talking by the fire.

"I've heard," said Brayford, "that Mr. Sleaford, *alias* Gardner, is visiting at Manor Farm, in the Marsh, Lincolnshire, and that Miss Crosby is at last likely to marry him. That makes me think the certificate you saw was a forgery."

"Oh, don't say that, for Willie's sake!" exclaimed the woman. "No, no, it's not true."

"Perhaps not. Don't let my bungling fancies upset you, my dear madam. What I wanted to say is this: supposing that he should be about to marry Miss Crosby, it is our place to stop him. I had no idea he was in England, and I expect he has only just returned from the Continent, though I did think I saw him in Baker Street last week. I suppose there is no city in the world where people can be so thoroughly lost as in London, and the nearer you are to those who may be looking for you, the further you are off. Here you are under the very nose of Miss Weaver, close to Robinson's house, a stone's throw from the West-End Bank, and you are practically as far away as if you were on the other side of the Channel."

Mrs. Gardner was staring intently into the fire.

"She is in one of her dreaming fits," said Brayford to himself. "I had better go on talking, and not notice it."

"Do you ever see faces in the fire?" she asked.

"Well, no; I can't say that I do."

"Oh Mr. Brayford," she said, "I am sure that some-

thing seriously affecting his life and mine is taking place while we sit here. I can see his face even while I speak."

She sighed deeply as she gazed into the glowing embers.

"Hark!" she exclaimed, in an earnest whisper, raising her hands, and bending her head to listen. "Did you hear nothing?"

"Well, no, my dear child, no," said Brayford.

"Didn't you hear that?"

"No, I really can't say I did."

"Not a voice saying 'Caroline, Caroline'?" she asked, rising to her feet.

"No, my poor child, no. Calm yourself; it is your fancy; you have had so much trouble, you see; you fancy these things."

"What will he say when he comes?" she asked, speaking more to herself than to Brayford, "when he comes and finds me? He will come, and my wicked heart longs for him. Oh, Christ, have mercy on one of Thy most miserable creatures!"

"We will light the candles," said Brayford, "and have tea. Mr. W. will be here, and we are going to have snapdragon."

He bustled about, lighted two candles, and commenced to clear away the remains of the Christmas dessert, calling Mrs. Aaron to his assistance.

"Mrs. Gardner is not quite well," he said. "If you could persuade her to go downstairs and have a nice chat with you, I think it would do her good."

Mrs. Aaron, taking the hint with kindly promptitude, went up to her lodger, and, putting a motherly arm about her, said, "Come and take tea with me, Mrs. Gardner. I've got a fresh lot of old china and some curious old finger-rings just come in. I'd like to show them to you. Won't you come?"

"I'll look after Master Willie," said Brayford. "Go with Mrs. Aaron; a little change will do you good, and when the snapdragon's ready, and I and Mr. W. have brewed the elderberry wine punch, Mr. W. shall run down and tell you."

Mrs. Gardner leaned her head upon the good woman's shoulder, and suffered herself to be led away.

CHAPTER V.

BETWEEN THE LIGHTS.

It was a singular, not to say picturesque, group that was gathered round the table in Mr. Harry Brayford's room to engage in the harmless delights of snapdragon. First there was the host himself in his faded velvet jacket, and with his mild, benevolent face half hidden in brown beard and whiskers, not untinged with gray. He sat at the head of the table, with Mrs. Gardner on his right hand and little Willie on his left. Mr. Gardner looked like an Oriental. She wore a double row of Turkish coins round her neck, a Christmas present made to her an hour previously by Mrs. Aaron, who sat opposite to Mr. Brayford in a stiff moire silk dress, adorned with a brooch of rubies and diamonds. Round her neck she wore a jet chain with jewelled clasps. She was a fat, dark, genial-looking woman, and in her conversational efforts she continually appealed to her husband Moses, an æsthetic-looking Jew, with long features and sunken eyes, and in other respects quite the figure to realize an artists' idea of some ancient Rabbi. Between these two notable examples of the chosen people sat Mr. W. or the Wonner, in a black threadbare coat, a yellow waistcoat, blue and white neckerchief folded many times round his neck. His white hair straggled about his ears, and an expression of gentle resignation filled his pleasant face. His eyes were continually bent on his master with a look of envious admiration. Little Willie, in a white frock and a red sash, sat up in a tall chair and crowed his first words to his heart's delight and to the gratification of the whole company, who were assembled rather to amuse him than to please themselves.

The apartment, which served Mr. Brayford for counting-house, manufactory, and dining and drawing-room, was equally characteristic of his new business, and that of the art trade of Mr. Moses Aaron. On an ancient desk, which two hundred years before had occupied a niche in the ministerial chamber of a Dutch statesman, were arranged the Post-Office Directories of London and the Home Coun-

ties, from which Mr. Brayford and his staff directed their envelopes and wrappers, which the founder of circularization often explained to Mrs. Gardner found their way into all corners of the empire, ranging from the cottage to the palace, from Marylebone to Windsor. Upon the walls hung a set of old family pictures, purchased at a sale of ducal treasures in the North of England. Interspersed among them were a modern newspaper map, a postal chart, and a couple of playbill reminiscences of Mr. Brayford's days of influence and prosperity. You might have looked for some token of the cemetery business, but you would not have found it, not even a sprig of yew among the holly and miseletoe which here and there decorated the picture-frames, and shone out bright and gay upon the mantelshelf.

One side of the room was filled with a carved oak bookcase, black with age. The shelves were partially filled with packets of prospectuses of the Lightning Utilizer and Safety Thunderbolt Company, Limited; notices of removal of Badem & Co., silk mercers; and the Soup and Chowder Association's pamphlets of the Anglo-American Providers Society; all of which were in course of postal manipulation by Brayford & Co. when the Christmas holidays were proclaimed to be in force by the patentee of the exploded three-act epitaph and the inventor of the living and prosperous system of circularization and cheap advertising. On the mantelshelf was a round mirror of considerable antiquity. In a corner near the fireplace stood a Venetian image of Shakespeare's Moor of Venice, which, having been exposed for twenty years in the Emporium window without eliciting a single inquiry, had been brought upstairs out of the way. The chairs were a miscellanious assortment of carved oak and modern Windsor, aud on the floor was a much-used Turkey carpet; while the fire on the hearth fell hot and glowing upon a brass fender, before which the Duchess of Metheringhem had often toasted her dainty toes, for Mr. Aaron had bought it from her maid when the duchess refurnished her boudoir in modern satin-wood and silver.

When, therefore, the light of the candles was extinguished and a match ignited the great dish of spirits and raisins, the scene was full of curious effects of light and shade. The faces round the table had a weird look. The laughter of little Willie and the chuckle of Mr. W. sounded the extreme notes of childhood. Between the lights every

now and then Othello seemed to look out from his corner; strange evidence of unsuspected figures behind the varnish were seen in the old pictures on the wall; the mirror on the mantelshelf flashed, in its depths of transparency, flames of blue and red. Is it for weal or woe that we see only the glimpses of the future that come to us through the gropings of our imagination in the darkness that separates to-day and to-morrow? Sometimes it seems as if heaven hesitated, and halted upon the thought whether it will not compromise matters by at least letting full daylight into the present, by bridging over with a second sight the wide expanse of sea and land between those who are dear to each other. In the case of Caroline Virginia Denton and Tristram Decker it is certain that, however imperfect the communication might be, there was between the two a bond of sympathy of sufficient electrical strength to thrill both hearts in moments of fear or danger, and that both organizations were sufficiently sensitive for the imagination to paint weird semblances of each other upon the uncorporeal air. In the lurid light of the Christmas dish, Mrs. Gardner again saw the face of Tristram Decker looking at her pale and wan; but her gratitude for the kindness which she had recently experienced made her exercise a powerful effort of will over an almost uncontrollable desire to manifest emotion at the ghostly sight. She clutched her chair with her hands; she pressed her feet upon the floor, and sat still until the vision faded out; and then she forced herself into an acted appearance of sympathy with the pleasures of the time. Mr. Brayford was full of humorous quips. Mr. W. continually chuckled his private opinion of his chief's cleverness. Mrs. Aaron thought of her dear boy, to whom Mr. Brayford had been such a loving friend; for she had come at last to convince herself that her lodger had known him since his babyhood. Mr. Moses Aaron screwed a smile out of his long, solemn features, and little Willie fairly screamed with childish delight.

No spiritual, electro-biological, or other manifestation indicated to Mrs. Gardner the continued existence of the late master of The Cottage at Essam; nor, for that matter, did her sensitive nature indicate the character of the perils with which Tristram Decker was struggling in the snow-blocked mountains of the Sacramento. It is for the historian whose facts are arranged under his hands to carry the reader from one scene to another irrespective of all ob-

stacles of time and place. Manor Farm was gay and bright on this Christmas Day of our history: Manor Farm had been twice to church; Manor Farm had helped to decorate the old house of God with laurel and with holly; and Manor Farm had brought home, after evening service, the parson and his wife and sundry other neighbors to speno the evening. The house was lighted up from kitchen to attic. A mistletoe, or "kissing bush," hung in the hall, decorated with ribbons and rosettes. There were blazing fires in the dining-room on one side of this spacious entrance way, and in the drawing-room on the other. A cold round of beef, a stuffed chine, a mighty cheese, two enormous pork-pies, and several dishes of plum-pudding and mince-pies filled the dining-table. The guests "helped themselves" when they pleased. On the sideboard were jorums of ale and decanters of port and sherry. Zancher Brown and Elijah Ward helped themselves continually under the direction of Mrs. Kester; while in the drawing-room, which had been given up to "a hand at cards," Mr. Amos Frith, James Johnson, Luke Giles, Mrs. Frith, and Mrs. Brown moistened their lips with hot posset, which old Goff handed round at every possible opportunity. Goff and Kester were as happy as they could be—happier, indeed, than Goff had ever dreamed to be possible; for, stimulated by the prospective engagement of Jane Crosby to Tom Sleaford, they had arranged with themselves to be man and wife also. Mrs Kester, when she accepted Goff, had said there were no fools like old fools, though she told Goff the change in their condition would, after all, only add to her exercise of authority, the right to order him about, which she had done for years without that right; and Goff had replied that he should obey her only the more cheerfully when she had obtained her power legally at the altar, for Goff no more dreamed of contradicting Mrs. Kester than he would have done if she had drunk at the well of St. Keene, or, like Southey's heroine, had secured her power by taking a bottle to church.

The rubicund parson and his comfortable wife sat quietly in the dining-room before the fire talking to Jane Crosby, while the music and clatter of dancing came through the open doorways from the kitchen, which had been cleaned and decorated for this merry festival. A mighty log, packed with smaller ones, burned brightly on the hearth; sconces, with "Christmas candles," were fixed upon the walls; the

hams and other stores had been removed from the ceiling beams, which were festooned with greenery; refreshments were set out on the dresser; old Shep lay curled up in the furthest corner of the ingle-nook at the feet of two old people, man and wife, who sat there thinking of the days when they could "foot it with the best of them."

The parson and his cheery spouse meanwhile were talking to Miss Crosby of the necessity of making up her mind to give a master to the Manor Farm estate, and more especially to let that gentleman be Mr. Tom Sleaford, who, during the last few months of his visiting in the neighborhood, had made friends on all sides.

Mr. Tom, it appeared from this conversation, had been staying at the George Hotel, Burgh, ever since he came down to the shooting in September, and it was well known why he lingered. Miss Crosby admitted that the young man had twice proposed to her, and that she feared she would be obliged to marry him at last, if not for herself, at least for his friends, who all seemed to be intervening in his behalf. The reverend incumbent of the parish said he understood that the Sleafords were an old Lincolnshire family, and he had himself deposited half his savings in the excellent London bank of which Mr. Tom Sleaford's father was the manager.

While they were talking, Tom Sleaford, fanning his face with his handkerchief, came walking into the room.

"Ah, here you are, Miss Crosby. I declare they have danced me almost off my legs. How do you do, sir, and madam?"

Mr. Tom Sleaford bowed to the parson and his wife, who both rose and shook hands with him, paying court to the future owner of Manor Farm pew.

"Where is Mr. Thompson?" asked Jane. "Is he dancing with Mrs. Kester?"

"Well, no; but he has been delighting everybody with his elegant steps in a polka with Miss Brown, and I left him in the midst of Sir Roger de Coverley."

Then Tom took the parson aside, and, with an apology to the two ladies, whispered in his ear; then the incumbent raised his hands with joyful surprise; then Tom said he must return or his partner would never forgive him, and that he claimed Miss Crosby's hand for the next dance; and as he left the room the reverend incumbent said he hoped Miss Crosby would give it him for life, and that he rejoiced

to learn, even in a whisper, that it was possible Mr. Sleaford might give him authority to put up the banns next Sunday.

Miss Crosby received this sally with a smile and an uncertain shrug of her handsome shoulders. Then she begged them to excuse her for a moment, and she quietly sought her own room, locked the door behind her, and sat down to think. But her head was in a whirl, and she went downstairs again as quickly as she had gone up, returning to the active business of her duties as hostess. She walked about among her guests, from drawing-room to dinning-room, card-tables to the dancing, a happy, wholesome picture of English beauty. She wore a gray silk dress, with white lace ruffles round her neck, sleeves that fitted tightly her well-shaped arms, and a bodice that showed the graceful contour of her rounded bust. Her brown wavy hair was plainly dressed; and her fair face, with its eloquent eyes and full rich lips, never looked more beautiful than in the homely, hospitable setting of Manor Farm. She had heard nothing of John Kerman since his sudden disappearance; but she felt sure he would return some day to atone for the past; and yet, with all her apparent strength of character, she had gradually allowed her feelings to be overshadowed by the persistent attentions of Tom Sleaford, who had laid himself out with all his arts to capture her. Woman is indeed a strange compound! One would have thought that the lady who had carried through that bold scheme of betting and edging and laying the correct odds for the financial salvation of Mr. Kerman could have held her own in any undertaking and in any situation. It must not, however, be forgotten that Jane had after all only carried out a plan which had been designed and shaped by Mr. Jabez Thompson, one of the keenest sporting lawyers in the Midland Counties. Mr. Tom Sleaford had no doubt been able to obtain a new footing in Miss Crosby's consideration through the knowledge that his sister Patty was deeply in love with Kerman. This was another unexpected trait in that young lady's character. Although she still maintained her usual composure of manner, and devoted herself to pink sunsets and rosy-tinted water-colors generally, she declined to marry Mr. Roper, whom she calmly informed that she loved Squire Kerman, and meant to marry him when he returned. Every possible influence, paternal, maternal and fraternal, had been brought to bear up-

on this apparently neutral-tinted young lady, but she adhered to this declaration just as firmly as she devoted herself to a particular class of landscape, in which the sun was continually setting, and the fields were always bathed in hues of pinky red. The £10,000 would take no harm, she said, lying at interest, and Mr. Tavener had supported her in this declaration, as he had also in her endorsement of the judgment of the trustees, in declining to allow the money to be removed to the coffers of the West London Bank of Deposit, to the secret, bitter, but unexpressed annoyance of Mr. Sleaford, who had, even in his preliminary calculations, counted upon the manipulation of John Kerman's romantic gift.

Jane Crosby sympathized with Patty Sleaford, and in her own generous way had schooled herself to think that it was Kerman's duty to marry her—a sentiment strongly in favor of the successfull wooing of Mr. Tom Sleaford. But beyond this was the astonishing fact that Tom had won over to his side the astute and clever Jabez Thompson. Tom's remarkable shooting on the 1st September had laid in the foundation of his triumph in that direction. "The fellow's father may be a scamp," though the sporting lawyer, "but a young man who can handle a gun with perfect form must be a gentleman." Tom had exercised in other ways thorough sportsman-like qualities, and had never missed an opportunity to play upon the generous nature of Jane's trustee. But it was in the hunting season that Tom Sleaford won the heart of Jabez Thompson. If he had distinguished himself in the stubbles of September, or on the adjacent coast when the woodcocks appeared, he had distanced all his previous successes in the hunting-field. A man who had a seat like Tom's and could go across country as straight, required no other qualification for the position of a country gentleman. Instead of showing the cockney white feather in the sternest situations of a country life, Tom had evidenced an aptitude for it which had made him popular throughout the Marsh. If his country friends could only have seen the real expression of Tom's face when he was alone after a whole day of acted *bonhomie*, perhaps they would not even then have been disenchanted. They would probably have attributed the cruel, anxious, gambler's look to fatigue. Tom Sleaford, *alias* Philip Gardner, had made up his mind to have Jane Crosby's consent to put up the banns on this night of the Christmas

feast. He had heard her say that if ever she were married she would have the banns put up in the good old-fashioned way, and Tom Sleaford made a point of jotting down in his memory, and thence at night into a memorandum-book, all her little expressed wishes or desires upon any kind of subject, so that he might impress her when he anticipated them, or acted upon them, or referred to them. He studied his game of wooing in every detail. He adapted himself to the Manor Farm surroundings with thoughtful care, studiously avoiding in tone or manner anything that could possibly savor of the London fop. Indeed, old Kester said, Mister Sleaford was born to be a Lincolnshire squire, and she was glad our Jane liked him at last; for if ever a young man had persevered, that young man was Mr. Sleaford, junior, though she did not hold with his father, and nothing would ever make her hold with a person as never looked you in the face, or if he did, seemed to be making a hole through you with a corkscrew; but a young man was not responsible for his father—he neither chose him nor made him; and Mr. Tom Sleaford had no right to suffer because his father was shifty, and his mother as useless as a door with its hinges off. Old Goff would solemnly shake his sides with laughter at Kester's smart sayings, and mentally clap himself on the back, to think that he had had the courage to propose to and also to win so remarkable, so wise, and so buxom a dame. He said he only hoped all married folk would be as happy as they, at which Mrs. Kester would say, "Get away with thee, thou old softy," and proceed with her work or her talk, whichever had been obstructed by the expressed indignation of her big, awkward, gray-headed companion, who had induced her to permit him to tie himself down to her apron-strings.

When the gigs and carriages and market carts of the Marsh had carried home most of her guests, Tom Sleaford asked Jane Crosby to let him put up the banns. She had made a struggle at the thought of laying aside for ever her fond but foolish memories of John Kerman, and had at last replied, that if Mr. Jabez Thompson gave his consent, she would. Tom rushed out for Thompson, and sent the lawyer, trustee, and friend into the drawing-room, where Jane was standing by the fire alone.

"What is it, my child?" he asked.

"Am I to marry Tom Sleaford?"

"I would if I were you," replied Thompson, in the same

laconic style which always characterized Jane's conversation with her old friend.

"You think he's a good fellow? "

"Yes; as the world goes, capital."

"If I accept him you will be satisfied?"

"Quite."

"You don't like his father?"

"No; I think he's a thief."

"That's bad. You don't think I ought to wait for—for Mr. Kerman?"

"Wait! What to be jilted again? A fool who has neither eyes for beauty, love nor money."

"Don't call him names."

"Then don't ask foolish questions."

"You like me, Jabez Thompson?"

"So much that if I weren't such a wizened old scarecrow, I'd have entered myself for the Manor Farm Stakes long ago."

"Yes, you are aged," said Jane, smiling; "but what I mean is, you wouldn't see me do anything you would think was a mistake?"

"I wouldn't."

"And you would advise me to marry Tom Sleaford?"

"You must marry somebody."

"Must I?"

"Certainly! You've no right to leave this property without heirs."

"Oh! Did Uncle Martin say so."

"His will as good as said so."

"There was something wrong about that will?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"Old Sleaford tried to stick in Tom's name instead of Jack's."

"Was that forgery?"

"Not exactly, and it wasn't burglary, but it was dishonest. However, that's all past, and it's a secret."

"And you think I ought to marry somebody?"

"Certainly."

"Tom Sleaford rather than nobody?"

"Tom Sleaford is a good match; he hasn't much money, but he's a good-looking chap—rides straight across country, likes country life, and is popular all about the place."

"Will you draw up the settlements in such a way that

part of the share of the estate which Uncle Martin intended him to have shall go to John Kerman."

"How much?"

"What you think fair and honest, and equal in generosity to his own behavior in relinquishing his claims."

"Yes, certainly."

"Please tell Mr. Sleaford that he shall have my answer to-morrow. I shall not see him again to-night. I am going to bed. That is my gig I think, coming round to the door now. Do you leave him to Burgh?"

"Yes."

"Good night, then."

She held out her hand. Mr. Jabez Thompson kissed it ceremoniously, and she left the room.

"Ah, my dear" soliloquized the lawyer, looking after her as she closed the door, "if I were only twenty years younger!"

While Jabez Thompson's high-stepper "Flyaway" was bounding along the hard, frost-bound road, over the great, wide Lincolnshire marsh, making allowance for the difference of time between this side of the Atlantic and the other, the man whom Tom Sleaford had begun to supplant in fame and fortune was fighting for very life in Decker's lonely Gulch, overlooking the wilderness of snow that had made the Sacramento valley a cemetery of the living and the dead.

CHAPTER VI.

A CHALLENGE UNEXPECTEDLY ANSWERED.

THAT first Sunday after Christmas dawned calm and still upon Manor Farm and the Marsh, upon the gray old church, upon the adjacent homesteads, upon all the great wide plain, white with frost and snow, and bright with a cold winter sky.

There was an unusual solemnity in the preparations for church-going that did not belong alone to the peculiar sacredness of the time, which received special signification in a choral service and the usual Christmas decorations. It had become known that the banns of marriage between Jane

Crosby and Tom Sleaford were to be proclaimed, and at Manor Farm and adjacent homesteads the event was one of great interest. Even Mr. Amos Firth, Luke Giles, and Zancher Brown dressed with extra care for church that morning, while Mrs. Brown declared that her three daughters had done themselves up as if they were going to a wedding itself." Elijah Ward had put on his best beaver hat, the silky fur of which fluffed into downy waves under the influence of the winter wind. The distance between Manor Farm and the church was but a few hundred yards, and the procession which wended its way from the farm to morning service was a picture of rural simplicity and repose. Miss Crosby, in a long, warm cloak, with Mrs. Kester walking respectfully by her side, was followed by Goff and Kester Shaw in dark broadcloth coats and breeches, and the other male and female servants of the family, two and two, carrying their Prayer-Books in their hands, the gilt dges of some of the volumes flashing in the light, and the gay bits of color here and there in the women's bonnets telling out against the wintry landscape.

The Manor Farm people and their neighbors were well seated before curious and inquiring eyes peeped out through the open doors of high-backed pews at Mr. Jabez Thompson and Mr. Tom Sleaford. Thompson, in his brown coat and brass buttons, his tight nankeen trousers, and his black and white spotted neckerchief, looked the keen sportsman he was. His ruddy face was shaven, his gray, short hair brushed close to his small round head, and his gold eyeglasses, with their black ribbon, sparkled on the lappets of his long old-fashioned vest. Tom Sleaford, with quiet, self-sustained ease, stepped into Mr. Thompson's well-cushioned pew, and surveyed the church with a calm look of interest before placing his hat under the seat and kneeling for a moment in imitation of his friend and patron.

While the antique organ was moaning out an old fashioned voluntary, under the manipulation of an old-fashioned operator, the congregation composed itself for the work of the morning's devotional exercises. Among the latest arrivals were two persons who came in a hired conveyance from Burgh. The organ was still stirring the dull soddened echoes of the church as Mr. Brayford handed out Mrs. Gardner, who had for the first time since her child's birth been prevailed upon to leave little Willie in the care of a third person. Mrs. Aaron would have taken it as a personal affront if she

had not done so, just as her solemn-visaged husband would have resented it as a deadly insult if Mr. Brayford had declined to accept from him the loan of a twenty-pound note to see him through his expedition to Lincolnshire "in the interests of British liberty and justice, to say nothing of honor, love, and truth."

"Wait one moment before we enter," said Mrs. Gardner. "I feel so nervous; my heart beats as if it would burst."

"Lean on my arm; I will support you, my child," said Brayford, encouragingly. "Don't be afraid; no harm shall come to you. You shall see whether an Englishman, however depraved, will be allowed to commit crime upon crime with impunity."

"Thank you; I shall be better presently," she said.

"They will let you put up your horse at the farm," Brayford said to the driver of the "covered car" which had brought them from Burgh; "we shall want you to take us back after the service."

The man got up into his seat, and urged his clumsy horse into the roadway as Brayford and his trembling charge disappeared in the shadow of the porch to emerge on the other side just as the opening words of the service brought the congregation to their feet. Brayford entered a half-empty pew among those of the humbler worshippers. He led the woman in and placed a hassock for her, upon which she knelt, burying her face in her hands. She prayed in earnest silence for strength and guidance. Brayford whispered to her, "Kneel as long as you wish; don't mind the service; have no fear; God will give us strength for our work; it is He who hath brough us here, that truth and virtue may not be ashamed." Brayford said this in further re-assurance of the woman's conduct; for she had resisted his advice, and at last would have been content with making a private communication to Miss Crosby; but Mr. Brayford would be satisfied with nothing short of a full and complete exposure of Tom Sleaford; and, in spite of the real nobility of Brayford's character, it must be confessed that it was not only Mrs. Gardner's wrongs which he was anxious to avenge, but his own; not only Miss Crosby whom he wished to save from the machinations of a villain, but the Sleafords to whom he wished to return in kind some of the indignities and miseries they had inflicted upon him. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," had impelled him to action, rather than the Saviour's teaching

of returning good for evil; and yet Brayford was satisfied that he had a right to look that Christian congregation in the face, and feel that he was doing a virtuous and religious work. Nor are we prepared to say that he was not, though it must be acknowledged his motives were rather mixed, and it would be no outrage on his good heart to say that the dramatic feature of the situation was not without some little attraction for him.

Mrs. Gardner rose from her seat when the congregation were chanting the psalms, which they did on holy days and great festivals, assisted by the organ and a voluntary choir of men and women. The scene and the music were very strange to her; but here a dreaming peacefulness had stolen upon her. Had it not been for a feeling that she was in some way doing her duty to her child by remaining, she would like to steal out of the church even now, and go back to the humble security of her London rooms. The pews in the old Marsh church were high and stately; but once she thought she could see the man whom she believed to be her husband, and more than once she did hear his voice joining in the solemn responses of the congregation to the priest. The service dragged on in a strange, dull mysterious fashion, at times leading her into dreams of the past, and then moving her to tears by its simple heart-stirring beauty.

Strange faces looked down on her from the gallery where the choristers sat, men and women, young and old. Once she thought the parson fixed his eyes upon her, and she bent her head in fear. Then again she prayed fervently and felt refreshed. By the time that the incumbent came to the reading of the second lesson for the day she was quite calm and resigned to her fate, whatever it might be. Brayford had marked the place in the Prayer-Book when it was his intention to bring down the reckless audacity and arrogance of Mr. Tom Sleaford, who had helped to ruin him, and who was in full tide of a successful attack upon an absent friend, who had helped Sleaford many a time in his need. Caroline had found comfort in the words of the second lesson; not only because they seemed prophetic, coming immediately before the dramatic event of the day, but on account of their appropriateness to her painful situation; and their general promise of strength in the hour of trial also impressed Brayford.

"Courage," he whispered, "those are God's words," as

he followed the comforting declarations of the prophet Isaiah, allotted to the contemplation of the faithful on the first Sunday after Christmas: "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

"Here ended the second lesson" were words that fluttered more than one heart in the congregation; for this is the period of the service at which the Church orders that banns of marriage shall be published. Jabez Thompson looked round at Tom Sleaford, and smiled as the minister began to fidget with some papers that lay by the side of his Bible. Jane Crosby bent down her head, and her heart beat wildly, for it seemed at the moment as if all the best instincts of her nature cried out against the declaration that was about to be made. For a moment the desire was strong upon her to repudiate the minister's authority; but she only turned round and looked helplessly at Mrs. Kester; and then pressing her hand upon her heart she heaved a sigh, that Kester declared might have been heard all over the church if at that moment the parson had not commenced to speak. These were the words that clashed upon Jane Crosby's sudden and unexpected signal of trouble:

"I publish the banns of marriage between Jane Crosby and Tom Sleaford. If any of you know cause or just impediment why these two persons should not be joined together in holy matrimony, ye are to declare it. This is the first time of asking."

"And the last!" exclaimed a voice from a pew at the east end of the church.

It was answered by a smothered expression of surprise from the entire congregation.

"I forbid the banns!" continued the voice, in loud, emphatic tones, and Brayford stepped from his pew into the aisle, with a dignity and firmness quite foreign to his customary manner, and quite equal to the solemnity of the occasion

"Walk into the vestry, sir," said the priest, in a voice tremulous with surprise and emotion.

"Pardon me, reverend sir," said Mr. Jabez Thompson, rising in his pew; "bear with me, my brethren; this is a

strange and startling situation. I would crave the venerable incumbent's permission that the grounds for this daring interruption may be stated, if possible, as publicly as this stranger's claim to be heard is made."

The incumbent was utterly overcome. The emergency was one which he had never previously encountered.

"I am no stranger to the Marsh or to the county," said Brayford; and I am ready to state publicly why I forbid the banns between Jane Crosby and Tom Sleaford."

Brayford was recognized by several members of the congregation, and his name was whispered audibly.

"On what grounds? I ask it as Miss Crosby's trustee and Mr. Sleaford's friend," demanded Jabez Thompson, the whole congregation having by this time risen to its feet.

"As the self-constituted guardian of Tom Sleaford's wife, I answer on the ground that he is already married," was the defiant and startling response.

"It is false!" exclaimed Tom Sleaford, looking towards the pew where Jane Crosby sat, with her face buried in her hands.

"It is true!" said a soft, gentle voice, as Brayford led Caroline Virginia Denton Sleaford into the aisle.

Jane Crosby raised her head and listened. Tom Sleaford was thankful that the incumbent of the parish now found himself sufficiently recovered from his surprise to interfere.

"Brethren," said the minister, "dearly beloved, the vestry is the place for this discussion; and inasmuch as our devotions have been rudely broken in upon, I crave your attention while I pronounce the benediction, for I am too much overcome to proceed further."

The congregation turned their faces respectfully and reverently towards the altar. The minister, much agitated, walked within the rails, delivered the priestly blessing, and fell upon his knees; while the congregation gradually left the church, to break up into groups in the porch and outside; and Mr. Brayford and the lady who claimed to be Tom Sleaford's wife went into the vestry. Miss Crosby remained in her own pew, and Mr. Jabez Thompson and Mr. Tom Sleaford had a whispered consultation in theirs. Hurriedly asked what it all meant, Tom Sleaford had replied,—

"Black-mail."

"The charge must be met without flinching," whispered Thompson, "true or not. If it is true, there are no words bad enough to describe your conduct."

"It is false, it is false," said Tom; "the woman has no claim upon me."

"If it is merely some indiscretion of a young man, or a case of black-mailing, you may get over it; though I doubt if Miss Crosby will ever see you again. Her pride will be cut to the quick."

"I know the woman, and I tell you her charge is false, and her object is money."

"Very well, then, come into the vestry, and confront her."

Mr. Thompson opened the pew door and went out into the aisle, his footsteps resounding through the empty church. Tom Sleaford buttoned his coat tightly over his chest, and followed the trim-looking old gentleman. "Neck or nothing," thought Tom, "I must break her down—crush her, that is my only chance. His brain was busy with inventions of her baseness and slurs upon Brayford's reputation. He knew nothing of the woman's escape from "The Retreat," the intrigue of Robinson, the rescue by Brayford. He had heard nothing of her or about her since the paragraph which noticed her adventure in Porter's Buildings and her introduction to Miss Weaver. When on an occasional visit to the West-End Bank of Deposit, in connection with which he held an honorary office, he had carefully avoided that part of Marylebone Road in which "The Retreat" was situated. Through the woman's silence, and the absence of inquiries being instituted by Miss Weaver, he had come to the conclusion that Caroline had gone back to the United States. A marriage with Miss Crosby was a far safer and more certain inheritance than banking transactions in which interest was paid out of capital: therefore he had laid careful and scientific siege to Manor Farm, and the garrison was surrendering to him at discretion when the diversion we have just described was brought about by the enemy whose operations he most despised, "that fool Brayford," as he was wont to speak of him in the old days, when he and his father were robbing him.

As the minister left the altar, he paused at the pew where Jane Crosby sat with Mrs. Kester at her side.

"It is a sad business," he said, "but it may be all for the best, whatever the end is."

"Yes," said Jane, bowing her head under the weight of shame and annoyance.

"The charge may be untrue."

Jane could not talk about it, even to the pastor.

"Thank you very much for your sympathy," she said; "Kester and myself will go home now. Will you, sir, be good enough to tell Mr. Thompson to call on me when he leaves the vestry?"

The minister saw that his best course was to leave Miss Crosby alone, and he went into the vestry.

"Do you think our neighbors will be gone home by this, Kester?" asked Jane, "or will they be waiting to condole with us and pity us?"

"I shouldn't wonder if they're all on 'em lying in wait, just as you think. Shall I look out and see?"

"Do, Kester, I'm too much ashamed to meet any friendly face at present."

Kester clattered down the aisle, brushing the Christmas decorations on the old Saxon pillars as she passed them, and presently returned to say that most of the congregation were standing about in the cold; some of them couldn't get away because their traps had not come for them; but the sexton had gone to unlock the door beneath the belfry, and they could walk over the foot-bridge across Martin's Dike, and go home that way without interruption. And so Jane Crosby stole away, and they who stood about the church saw her go by a back path to the farm, and she never once lifted her head.

As the news spread, the few conveyances for which most of the shivering congregation were waiting arrived; and as the persons in the vestry seemed likely to remain there for a long time, the people gradually went away, dotting the wide plain in various directions, and disappearing at the homesteads, where long columns of smoke went up into the frosty air, or fading from the sight behind the mist which in all seasons hangs about the sky-line on the broad fringe of the great Lincolnshire flat.

Meanwhile Mr. Brayford told Caroline Virgina Denton's story, and Tom Sleaford, with hard, unflinching firmness, denied it all, except that "this woman had been his mistress." He owned that his conduct to that extent was immoral, and perhaps indefensible in the eyes of a minister of the Gospel; but Mr. Thompson, as a man of the world, would not look upon it from so severe a standpoint.

Tom Sleaford overdid his defence; and his attack upon his victim overleaped itself. He branded her as an impostor, and worse. He spoke of her being found in the lowest haunts of vice in London, and gave that as a reason why he could not seek her out; for he felt that she had fallen too low for restoration even to her friends.

These taunts did not touch Caroline as he had expected. She looked up through her tears at the minister and at Mr. Thompson, and the reproachful innocence of her face appealed to their judgment as well as to their hearts. The blacker Tom Sleaford painted her, the whiter she shone, though she only uttered a word of denial or explanation now and then.

"I wouldn't have come here," she said, "but that I was persuaded it was the only way to save a good, true woman from a life of misery and a bad man from another crime; though I have been and am anxious to establish my marriage for the sake of my child, not for my own sake—not for my own sake."

"You don't know the craft of this woman," said Sleaford. "You do know, sir," he continued, now addressing the clergyman, "that the devil can assume a pleasing shape for his own purposes. This woman, the degenerate daughter of some miserable slave-owner by a black mother——"

"No!" exclaimed Caroline, interrupting him, and appealing to the others. "If you are men, you will not let him say that, lest the very church fall on us where we stand."

Only an American can fully appreciate the bitterness of this last invention of Tom Sleaford's malice.

"Don't excite yourself, my child," said Brayford, laying his hand gently upon her shoulder. "Don't listen to his vile slanders; be seated. None of us believe a word he says."

Tom Sleaford made a step towards Brayford in a threatening attitude; the minister raised his hand deprecatingly, and Mr. Thompson took Sleaford by the arm.

"The other gentlemen don't know him as well as I do," continued Brayford, while he induced the woman, by signs, to be reseated. "They don't know that he is a thief as well as a liar."

"Mr. Brayford," expostulated the parson, "such language as that——"

"Is the language of the Scriptures and the Gospel you

preach! I do not use it in passion, sir, but calmly, as I look that felon in the face, and denounce him as a thief and a liar, and the son of a father no less abandoned."

It taxed Jabez Thompson's strength to hold Tom Sleaford, whose rage now got the better of his discretion.

"There is only one answer to words of that character," he cried.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," remonstrated the incumbent, "this is a desecration of the sacred edifice in which we are assembled. Mr. Brayford, I must beg of you to withdraw that language."

"If it offends your reverence, I must withdraw it here, but only to repeat it outside, where Mr. Sleaford can give me that particular answer he pretends to be anxious about," said Brayford, adding, as he noticed the anxious face of Caroline, "Don't be alarmed, my child; don't be alarmed."

"And I also beg," said the parson, "that you will not forget that this is the Lord's Day."

Jabez Thompson had not spoken a single word to interrupt or to modify the explanation of this painful business. He had watched the parties with the critical eye of a man of the world, who had had some experience in judging men and women.

"Excuse me, Mr. Incumbent," he said, "and you, madam, and gentlemen, I think we may now bring this matter to a close. Have you, Mr. Sleaford, any more to say?"

"Only to repeat that——"

"Don't repeat anything," said the lawyer, interrupting him. "What we have heard is sufficiently impressed upon our minds. Have you anything to add?"

"Only to denounce these persons as conspirators and black-mailers."

"Yes, yes," said the lawyer, impatiently; "and you, Mr. Brayford?"

"Do we look like conspirators and black-mailers?" asked Brayford.

"No, I am bound to say you do not," replied the lawyer, "since you ask me the question; and I feel it equally my duty as an honest man to say that at present I can only regard my ward, Miss Crosby, next to this lady, as a most wronged and injured woman——"

"But, Thompson——" interfered Tom Sleaford.

"You said you had finished," replied Thompson.

Tom Sleaford retreated a step backward.

"I don't know," continued Thompson, turning to look at Tom Sleaford, "whether you married this woman or not, but I have no doubt that you have treated her cruelly, and I have to thank Mr. Brayford, and I do so humbly, for saving my ward from a lifelong misery to which I should have condemned her; I, who have but one object in life, to minister to her happiness; I, who, with all my experience, couldn't tell a scoundrel from an honest man!"

The old man turned coldly upon Tom Sleaford as he dealt him this blow. The younger man staggered under it, and looked round upon the group as if he were at bay, and in doubt whether to attack or retreat.

"If, sir," said the lawyer, the color mounting to his already florid cheeks, "if you think there is any possibility of your reversing this verdict, you can appeal; and in that case I shall be in my office on Monday morning at ten o'clock."

"This is cruel," gasped Tom Sleaford, flinging himself into a chair with the air of an injured man, for in presence of the belligerent aspect of both Thompson and Brayford he now deemed the business of martyrdom the most becoming role.

"Where are you staying, Mr. Brayford?" asked the lawyer.

"At the George."

"I will wait upon you at twelve on Monday, if the hour will be convenient."

"Yes, sir, certainly," said Brayford.

"Good-morning," said the lawyer, bowing to the incumbent and to Brayford and the lady; and, straightening himself as he looked at Tom Sleaford with an air of contempt and defiance, he took up his hat and left the vestry, his firm footsteps resounding through the old place until the great doors of the porch clanged upon them, and he was gone.

Mr. Brayford signified to Caroline that they, too, should go; and the parson took off his gown, and began to put on his overcoat

"I would like to speak to you, sir, before we leave," said Tom Sleaford.

Brayford and Caroline bowed to the minister, and left the church. Their conveyance was waiting for them; and when Tom Sleaford stood in the porch, taking his leave of the incumbent, to whom he protested that he was the victim

of a wicked and cruel conspiracy, he could see the "top car," which was conveying his accusers to Burgh, tossing to and fro upon the frozen waste like a vessel on the ocean, but not so agitated as his own thoughts, which jostled each other in their wildness and perplexity. He started to walk to Burgh, some eight miles, over the broad plain, where, in the olden days, the Saxons had made their last desperate stand against the Norman conqueror. At first he merely crawled along, like a man uncertain of his course. Presently he felt the chill of the biting air and the frosty wind that came in withering gusts down dike and drain from the sea. He stopped for a moment as if to face it and defy it, shaking himself like a dog after a swim. Then he stepped out, breasting the wind, facing the blast, and he began to curse and swear aloud, denouncing the absent in foul terms and with opprobrious epithets. Then he rehearsed in his mind the murder of Brayford. He could have done the deed at that moment. For the first time in his cowardly life he realized, as he thought, the feelings of a murderer, the desire for blood. He saw Brayford at his feet appealing for mercy. He saw himself beating down, raining bloody blows upon his head.

"And you!" he screamed, as he paced along, defying the winter wind, "and you, Mrs. Gardner! Wait! You are my wife, and you are not, as I may elect. It may suit my humor to claim you. And then! curse you, I'll be even with you!"

When Jabez Thompson discovered that he had allowed his first feelings of suspicion in regard to the character of Tom Sleaford, not only to be lulled into repose, but that the diplomatic amiability of the young man and his assumed frankness had replaced doubt with confidence, and suspicion with friendship; and that he had been cheated into this amicable relationship, he was angry in proportion to the assistance he had given Tom in his successful overtures for the hand of Miss Crosby. The clever lawyer had been wilfully deceived, for he had had evidence of the father's villany, and he had condoned the discreditable features of the son's financial difficulties. The astute man of the world, who, knowing horses so well, should have had some insight into human character (for it is an ascertained fact that men much devoted to the breeding, rearing, and running of race-horses become intelligent physiognomists), the generally

acknowledged reliable and keen sportsman, who could bring down his man in an argument as well as his bird in the air, had been duped. He was, therefore, fully possessed with the anger of a generous man who has been victimized through the magnanimity of his disposition. Tom Sleaford went to him boldly on Monday morning at ten o'clock to appeal against the verdict of Sunday, and had found the obdurate judge prepared with half-a-dozen special interrogations as hard to answer as the case put against him in the vestry. Mr. Thompson not only informed him that Miss Crosby had given him express instructions to forbid his appearance at the Manor Farm, but advised him to quit the Marsh with all speed, lest some means were formed for detaining him against his will. Tom Sleaford left the office and went straight to his hotel, and ordered his horse to be saddled; while the lawyer waited upon Mr. Brayford, to satisfy himself more completely upon some points of the indictment against the scoundrel who had played so artfully upon his amiability and his mad admiration of sportsman-like feats and aptitude for country life.

In spite of the lawyer's admonition, Tom Sleaford presented himself at Manor Farm to seek an interview with Miss Crosby. He was met by Goff, who went far beyond the instructions of the mistress, when he said that he and any laborer about the farm who caught him on the place had orders to chuck him into the nearest dike. Tom was not coward enough to accept that declaration tamely, especially when the speaker was an old man. He seized Goff by the throat, and shook him till Kester's admirer began to turn blue. "That's my answer to your orders!" exclaimed Tom, throwing his man, and getting upon his horse, which he had tied to the gate leading into the farm. As he galloped away he found a little patience in his mind now that he had to some extent vindicated his physical manhood, which had not been questioned. But his latest disappointment and all his troubles he laid at the door of Caroline Denton and Harry Brayford, and he made a coarse, profane vow with himself to be revenged. At night he had taken a late train on the way to London; and left the Marsh to settle down to its theories, gossip, explanations, descriptions, and surmises concerning the forbidding of the banns.

For many a month afterwards this was the most engrossing, romantic, and sensational topic of the district. It divided the honors at tea-tables, whist-parties, and market

dinners with the latest murder. No banns were published in any of the local churches without exciting a thrill of suspense to circulate through the sensitive constitution of every congregation, ending in a sigh of relief when, after a sufficient pause, no voice was raised in response to the priestly challenge—"If any of you know cause or just impediment why these two persons should not be joined together in holy matrimony, you are now to declare it."

CHAPTER I.

TRAVELLERS FROM FAR AND NEAR.

WINTER had been vanquished by spring. Even the icy fastnesses of the Californian mountains had succumbed to the attack of the lusty monarch of the leafy year. The Sacramento, released from its frosty moorings, made gladsome music in the mighty valley. The busy miners who had lived through the Christmas storms once more wielded their picks and shovels. When the snow had gone, their less fortunate brethren were discovered by the sunshine, stark and stiff, awaiting the resurrection. Some of these victims to the gold mania had, to all appearance, at the beginning of the winter chosen localities far better protected from wind and weather than those who had been saved. No matter where you pitch your tent or how you shield it, if your time be come. Similarly it signifies not that the mountain crush your house and the snow overwhelm you, if it please God to put forth His hand to your rescue.

Decker and Kerman survived the disasters of that never to be forgotten Christmas in the Sacramento, and they arrived at the Palace Hotel, London, on a bright May day, when the great city was putting on its gay clothes; when the almond trees were in blossom, and green leaves decorated sombre streets and squares with fresh and delicate tints; when country cousins and county belles thronged the West-end streets, and added to the lustre of the Row; when Cruel London put on her most artful smiles, and opened all her golden gates with clang of gong

and clash of bells to those accredited to her exclusive court by favor of birth and fortune, or by force of swagger and false credentials. As yet she knew not Decker nor Kerman. Their fame had not at present reached even her scouts and her emissaries, else she would have made ready to greet them and smile a ready welcome; for the new-comers were among the world's richest men. John Kerman, despised of time-serving clubmen, the vulgar hero of Doncaster and Fitzroy Square, was rich as the richest of the Rothschilds. Tristram Decker was the principal owner of a region of gold. He could not count his wealth. For him an El Dorado had sprung up in response to his prospecting rod. His wildest hopes and his worst fears had been realized. He was endowed with untold gold and a fatal disease. An eminent American physician had confirmed his belief that consumption had laid its bony hand upon him and numbered his days. The doctor had warned him that only with care could he possibly live five or seven years, and to secure that short respite it was necessary that he should sojourn in a warm and equable climate. England, he said, was better suited to his condition than the United States; but his advice was to seek rest in the soothing atmosphere of Madeira. It was a poor business that all his wealth could do no more than this. He would have given every foot of his golden farm for good health, if Caroline Denton was single, and would take him for himself; otherwise he would cheerfully accept the penalty of death, with the power to load her with riches in return for five years of her society. The more certain his early death, the more his soul yearned for the love of this woman. The poorest laborer in the streets who had health and strength to enjoy his hard-earned meal had no cause to envy Tristram Decker. Knowing his future, the veriest beggar might have shrunk from changing places with him.

Tristram Decker's mission in life, as he laid it down for himself, was to find Mr. William Graham Denton, and to lavish riches upon him for the sake of his daughter; and, if she were still single, to beg her from pure charity to make his short stay in the world happy, out of the wild, deep, maddening love he bore her. What a world of disappointment and sorrow fate had in store for him! His love had idolized the object of his fancy. His poetic temperament, his imaginative power, his egotistic selection of

the Southern girl as a type of all that is pure and tender and good and true in woman had never for a moment permitted a suspicion of weakness in his idol. It might chance that to doubt her would be to hate her. To admit a flaw in the angelic figure would be to cry aloud for the destruction of an impostor, whose overpowering beauty only heightened her offense. How would he read that story of her life at Essam, with all those attendant smudges that come out of touching the world's pitch?

"I don't know," he said, as they sat at a window of the hotel, watching the stream of London life as it ebbed and flowed in the shadow of Westminster Abbey—"I don't know that a man in my condition has a right to ask a young girl to marry him. Nor an old one, for that matter," he added, with a smile.

"There are thousands who would be only too glad to have you, Tristy, if you were on your deathbed even."

"Perhaps the readier on that account, Jack. What an inheritance I should be! But to linger about, an invalid, for five years, and ask a lovely girl to be my nurse, that's hardly fair, is it?"

"You take too gloomy a view of the situation. I will find a doctor who will put you right. London is a cruel city, but it's mighty clever, old man; perhaps the cleverest under the sun."

"Ah, well," said Decker, "we shall see what we shall see. It will be all the same a hundred years hence, anyhow. The men who built that abbey church have had neither headache nor heartache for a good many hundred years, Jack."

"No, my boy, no," Kerman replied. "We must go and see it, Tristy. When I did the swell business in London it wasn't the thing among my set to go about seeing the sights of the place; it was only common folks or foreigners who prowled around Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, the Tower, and St. Paul's; and it was your duty to cut anybody dead who had been up the Monument, though I'm told it's a wonderful sight to look down on London from the top of the column, or, for that matter, from the dome of St. Paul's."

"What is our programme, Jack?"

"We ought to rest to-day and do nothing, but that won't suit you, I know; so I have ordered a carriage to be here in an hour to take us to the City to see our bankers,

to ask them who is the best doctor for you to consult; and then I think we will look up that curious fellow Harry Brayford, and take him into our counsels, that is, if you like the looks of him, and I see no reason to change my mind about him. His place will amuse you, at all events; and he is a character."

"Very well, Jack," said Decker; "we must lose no time; I must get on the track of the Dentons; you must help me with that old Secesh; he'll be likely to listen to a manly, straight-spoken good fellow like you, Jack. And Caroline! Oh, my dear boy, if you only knew how my very soul yearns for that woman!"

"We are both in the same boat, for that matter, Tristy, only I'm not such an impulsive, tempestuous chap as you are; if I had been we should never have met."

"Then I am glad you are as you are."

"If you had been me, you would have taken Tom Sleaford by the throat at that reception I have so often told you of, and carried Jane Crosby off by storm."

"Yes, by the sacred stars and stripes I should!" exclaimed Decker. "I have always thought that fellow was a sneak and a cur."

"Perhaps he was; I often think he was now, though I didn't at the time. Supposing Jane is his wife! That will be a bitter pill, Tristy. Unless that message of mine, in which I exposed my heart to her, gripped her true womanly nature, she is Mrs. Tom Sleaford. Well, I can't blame her. I wonder how Mrs. Roper gets along?"

"Who is she?"

"The little girl who would have sacrificed herself for my money."

"Oh, yes, I remember your telling me about her. She's happy enough if she's been lucky; it's quite clear she knew the value of money."

"Well, Tristy, you will have plenty of opportunities of testing the strength of your golden talisman in this city."

"I hope so."

"I must introduce you to old Sleaford; he would sell his soul for money. It will amuse you, who are shrewd in the world's ways, to see him begin to lay traps and snares for your coin. And there's a confederate named Robinson, the Hon. Fitzherbert Robinson, as some people used to call him. He's a sort of decoy bird; says 'Haw! haw!' and talks of his friend Lord This and Lord That. We shall

have some fun, Tristy, when we've got all our serious business settled. You'll like a turn in the city. Old Maclosky Jones, he's as wily as poor old Maggs was. Lord, how they cleaned me out among them. What a fool I was, to be sure!"

It was quite an accidental circumstance, if anything in this life is accidental, that brought Decker and Kerman to this particular hotel, in the shadow of Westminister Abbey; but it was the only house at which Mr. Jabez Thompson stayed during his brief visits to the metropolis, and when Jane Crosby resolved to leave the farm to the care of Mr. and Mrs. Goff, and take a holiday in London and a trip to Paris, Mr. Jabez Thompson had engaged rooms for herself and maid at this establishment. For many weeks after a certain painful incident of the first Sunday after Christmas, Miss Crosby had refused to see anybody, or to visit with her neighbors. Her pride and her remorseful belief that heaven had punished her for being untrue to the only man she really loved, had kept her mind in a continual agitation, until her health was seriously affected, and she had been compelled under medical direction, to take long rides by the sea. To set her up completely, the local authority declared change of scene necessary, and Mr. Jabez Thompson had exercised his influence so successfully as to arrange a visit to London and Paris, appointing himself his ward's "lord in waiting." They had had some little discussion upon the point in regard to the proprieties; Jane had said she did not care to furnish the Marsh with another scandal; and, after all, her shrewd trustee had not shown himself the most discreet adviser an unprotected woman could have. Jabez had argued that she couldn't visit London and Paris without somebody to take care of her. He hoped, while he was experienced enough to do that, he was also sufficiently aged to be above suspicion. Half in earnest, half in fun, the proprieties had been inquired into and studied, and finally pronounced satisfactory by guardian and ward; and the very day before Decker and Kerman arrived in London, Miss Crosby and her maid and Mr. Jabez Thompson entered the Palace Hotel. Kerman might have seen their names in the book of arrivals if he had looked at it. The world is very little, after all.

As Decker and Kerman were leaving their rooms in response to the announcement that the carriage was at the door, Miss Crosby was coming along the corridor. The

meeting was not romantic, but the situation was fraught with interesting and important consequences. Kerman gripped Decker's arm, and came to a sudden standstill, as a well-dressed woman in full morning attire, bonneted, cloaked, and gloved, came sailing along with beaming face and elastic tread. She did not appear to see any one. She was evidently in a hurry. Kerman recognized her on the instant.

"Miss Crosby!" he gasped, as she was about to pass him.

She turned round inquiringly, as if in doubt whether she had been spoken to or not; and then the color left her cheeks, and she looked anxiously into Kerman's face.

"John!" she exclaimed, "Mr. Kerman; why, really, is that you?"

"It is, indeed," he said.

The color rushed back to her cheeks, and there was an expression of joy in her face which overcame all Kerman's caution and reticence. In another moment he had caught her in his arms and kissed her.

Decker sauntered along the corridor.

"Jane, forgive me," said Kerman, trembling with emotion; "I couldn't help it. If you only knew how much I love you!"

She disengaged herself and looked confused.

"Ah, John," she said, "if you had only told me that before you went away!"

"Why, why?" he asked, ten thousand fears besetting him. "It is not too late, Jane?"

"I don't know," she said, in a low, sad voice.

"You are not married?"

"Thank God! no," she replied.

"Amen!" said Kerman. "But why that anxious look? You are not engaged?"

"No."

"Then let me engage you now, Jane, and make up that lost time when some devil blinded me to your goodness, and hid my love under a mountain of conceit and pride."

"You have surprised me so much I hardly know where I am or what I'm saying. See, there are people coming along the passage. This is our sitting-room, No. 6—will you come in?"

"Not till you say 'Yes,'" he replied, taking her arm and

linking it in his own, and walking to and fro opposite the room she had indicated.

"Oh, John, you know I will say 'Yes.' I do say 'Yes' with all my heart, but——"

"But—why but?"

"Strange things have happened since you went away. When you know all you may not care whether I say 'Yes' or 'No.'"

"Not care!" he repeated, the old vague fears crowding about his heart. "Jane, what is this mystery?"

"I have made a fool of myself?"

The frank, almost blunt, character of the woman came out full and hearty in this rough mode of explanation.

"Made a fool of yourself?" said Kerman, the expression even striking him as incongruous in the mouth of this handsome and elegant woman.

"You are letting my arm drop. You like me a little less already."

He pressed her arm to his side.

"You were always a strange girl," he said, pausing to look into her face, "but as good and true as steel; and you shall please yourself, Jane, whether you tell me another word about what has happened. If you don't tell me I'll never ask you; but nothing can change my love for you, and we'll be married to-morrow, if you will."

"Jack, it shall be as you please; it's not my fault that we were not married long ago. God bless you for this confidence and trust!"

The tears came into her eyes. She had tried to keep them back by an effort to be off-handed and careless, but the large-hearted, manly words of her lover touched her, and the fountains of feeling welled over.

"Come in and see Jabez Thompson," she said, sobbing as she led him to the room. "He's waiting for me. He will explain, he will tell you. I was not so much to blame as you may think at first. They worried me—he pestered me—Jabez thought it was right.'

They were in the room by this time.

"Jabez Thompson, here is John come back again. Tell him what a fool I made of myself. He wants to marry me. If he doesn't change his mind when you have explained all that has happened, ring the bell and send Mary to tell me to come back. I am going to my room."

Before Thompson could recover from his surprise, and shake Kerman by the hand, she was gone.

"Excuse me a moment," said Kerman, "I have a friend outside."

He rushed to Decker.

"My dear Tristy, it is Jane."

"I knew it."

"Will you wait a little longer for me?"

"A week, if you like."

Kerman went back to No. 6, and Decker lounged about the end of the corridor, where he could see the Abbey. All educated Americans know the history of England; some of them are better acquainted with the stories of our famous buildings than we are ourselves. It had been one of Tristram Decker's earliest dreams to visit England, and this poem in stone at Westminster, linking the present with the vague and misty past, had always held his imagination captive. Face to face with this wonder of the age, even Caroline left his thoughts for a moment, while his mind wandered back into the uncertain paths of tradition, and made pictures for itself out of schoolboy memories and historical romance. He was presently recalled from his reverie by Kerman, who begged him to come and be introduced to Miss Crosby and Mr. Jabez Thompson, "the fine old country squire I told you of over our wood fire in the Sacramento."

Jane Crosby had been sent for, as requested, and she had returned dressed for luncheon, looking the picture of all that is fresh and charming in woman. Kerman had informed her that Mr. Thompson had explained everything, and all he had to say about it was that he must find out that poor little woman who had stood between him and Tom Sleaford, and give her a substantial proof of his gratitude. The rest of the story he discussesd in the same spirit of thankfulness that Fortune had been so good and true; for what right had he to expect that Jane would keep single, and that if she did, he, of all other men in the world, could induce her to marry?

Though hardly an hour had passed since the meeting, John and Jane had settled all possible differences between them, and when Decker appeared on the scene, he completed the gathering of a happy family. Jabez Thompson, neat as ever, his face shining, his head erect, welcomed Decker to England, and Jane gave him an invitation to Manor Farm.

Kerman engaged them all to dine together in his room

that evening; and then remembered that he and Decker had business to transact, and that a carriage had been waiting for them at the door for more than an hour.

"By the way," he said, "we are going to call on Brayford; at least, I was going to take Decker to his place, partly out of curiosity to see a character."

"Poor devil!" exclaimed Thompson.

"Why?"

"The Sleafords ruined him."

"Is he poor, then?"

"Very."

"That's a shame; he was a good fellow."

"There is not a better," said the lawyer.

"Then he shall be rich."

"How?"

"I'll make him as rich as the richest gravedigger in London."

"You? Have you hit upon a new idea for him?"

"Yes, I have; it will astonish him."

"He is not in that line of business now."

"No! What is his profession now?"

Mr. Thompson consulted a pocket-book, and took out a card.

"That's his address and his new business."

"Circularizer and Advertising Agent," said Kerman, reading it. "Well, we can give him some business in the advertising way, I think, Tristy?"

"Yes," said Decker, smiling sadly.

"For the present, then, good-by," said Kerman, taking Jane's hand.

"Till dinner-time," said Thompson, in his breezy way."

Jane went to the door to watch them down the corridor, and Kerman took advantage of the shadow of the entrance to kiss her.

"Come along, Tristy," he exclaimed, taking his companion by the arm. "Forgive me for being so happy. It seems unkind to you, old man; but I'll make up to you for it. We'll find your Southern beauty now, and arrange a double marriage."

As Decker and Kerman's carriage turned to enter the Thames Embankment from Westminster, a pretty barouche came along Parliament Street, skirted Palace Green, and stopped at the hotel. Mr. Tavener had excited the jealousy of Mother Sniggers to the highest pitch, when one day this

vehicle arrived brand new, with a pair of prancing horses and a coachman; but when the entire turnout became a part of the social economy of the artist's domestic arrangement, then Mother Sniggers knew that there was really something wrong. But that did not trouble Mr. and Mrs. Tavener. Frank had made his "hit," and the money came rolling in. They hung his pictures on the line now, and the dealers kept up a continual competition for the honor and profit of buying them. Hence the barouche and pair. Miss Crosby had informed Mrs. Tavener of their arrival in town, and had expressed a great desire to see her again, and also Patty, whose devotion to Kerman she had heard of through Mr. Brayford. The young lady had risen in Miss Crosby's estimation when she thought of her own weakness, and she begged Mrs. Tavener, if she should call upon her, to bring Patty, whom she hoped to see some day at Manor Farm.

It was, however, with feelings somewhat different to those under the influence of which she had written to Mrs. Tavener that Jane now received the sisters of Tom Sleaford.

When they were announced she was in her bedroom, upon her knees, weeping tears of joy, and offering up prayers of thankfulness. She arose hurriedly, dried her eyes, and paused to think what she should say and do in regard to the sudden and unexpected arrangement between herself and Kerman. The thought of Patty Sleaford's disappointment troubled her, and she tried to compose her features into a state of calmness, though she utterly failed to eliminate from the expression of her face the joyousness of her heart.

"Ah, my dear, I am so glad to see you!" she exclaimed.

Emily kissed her with an earnest hug; Patty embraced her with her accustomed *sang froid.*

"And this is your husband? I am proud to make your acquaintance, Mr. Tavener! I have often wondered what you were like. I am quite satisfied. Miss Sleaford, I congratulate you; and Mr. Tavener, I congratulate you."

"Thank you for both of us, Miss Crosby," said Tavener, smiling, and stroking his long flowing beard.

"And may I ask after Mr. Roper?"

This to Patty, who stood aside from her sister and brother-in-law in her neutral way.

"Yes, Miss Crosby; and he is very well," she said, in measured tones.

"I am glad of that. Do you see him often?"

"Once a week," said Patty, without indicating pleasure or annoyance thereat.

"I quite expected to have had cards from you ere this —'Mr. and Mrs. Roper,' you know."

Jane was feeling her way to a disclosure of what had just occurred.

"Indeed," said Patty, "I am in no hurry to be married; certainly not to Mr. Roper."

"I was afraid, after what had occurred on the first Sunday after Christmas, neither of you might come and see me; but I couldn't help it, you know, and——"

"My letter of sympathy and regret should have assured you that I had only a sisterly and womanly feeling for you in the matter, my dear Miss Crosby," said Emily taking up the point without waiting for Jane to explain further.

Jane blushed.

"Yes, yes," she said, "it was very good and very kind. Some people wouldn't speak of a painful affair like this; but I don't hold with keeping back what is in your heart, and I know we are all thinking about it."

"That is true," said Mrs. Tavener. "The same outspoken, open-hearted woman as of old. Isn't she all I said she was, Fred?"

"My wife never tires of singing your praises, Miss Crosby," said Tavener.

"I cannot tell how much I value her good opinion, and desire her friendship. I am not what you call a society lady, and it's no good pretending that I am. It's better to be what you really are than try and seem to be something else."

"Truth, honesty, and kindness," said Emily, "adorn any society; do they not, Fred?"

"And they go hand in hand with happiness, I do believe," said Tavener, looking at Miss Crosby; "for your friend's is the most joyous face I have seen in London for many a day."

"I could wish it were not so at this moment, sir," said Jane. "Will you excuse me if I take Miss Patty into my room for a few minutes. I have news for her which I should like to tell her first."

"Oh yes," said Emily.

"Will you come with me, Miss Patty?" asked Jane, putting her arm round that young lady and leading her away.

When the door was shut and they were alone, Jane Crosby said:

"They tell me you refuse to marry Mr. Roper because you love Mr. Kerman. Is that true?"

"Yes, it's partly true," answered Patty, calmly.

"But if Mr. Kerman married somebody else?"

"Then I would forbid the banns," said Patty, with something like a cynical chuckle.

"Yes, you've a right to sneer, my girl; I like it. The thought of my weakness helps me to be thankful for my escape."

Patty looked at her inquiringly.

"It is all for your good the question I am asking you, and what I am going to say."

"Is he married, then?" asked Patty.

"Should you grieve much if he were?"

"What would be the good of grieving?" said Patty, as if she were asking a question in mental arithmetic.

"No good," said Jane. "You would then say 'Yes' to Mr. Roper?"

"The more I say 'No' to him, the more he likes me."

"But that is not the reason why you don't say 'Yes?'"

"I did not want Mr. Kerman to think I was mean about his money."

"Is that all? Be frank with me, won't you? I can't help admiring and loving you for your devotion."

"I thought he behaved so nobby," said Patty, not moved one jot out of her usual manner; "it was like something out of a book."

"Yes, it was indeed."

"And I wanted him to have his money back. I knew papa would get it away from Mr. Roper: and papa isn't to be trusted."

"Don't say that, dear."

"You asked me to be frank."

"But we are taught to honor our parents."

"And are they not to be worthy of our honor? When Roper had no money pa objected to him, and wanted me to marry John Kerman. When he gave all his money away, and ten thousand pounds to the man who should

marry me, then he told me I might marry Roper. I was not going to be dealt with as if I were scrip in the city."

The slightest deepening of the pink color in Patty's cheek, and a touch of something like earnestness in the utterance of the last sentence, which was delivered in a louder tone of voice than usual, showed that underneath the girl's calm, phlegmatic, and cold manner there might be a smouldering volcano. Jane Crosby kissed the pinky-white face as she said,—

"Quite right, my child; quite right."

"And so I told them all I loved John Kerman."

"Yes; and did you? As well as Mr. Roper?"

"Just then I did."

"But now, dear, now? Would you marry him if he asked you to-day?"

"Not if he is married already."

"No, no; but if Mr. Roper asked you to decide to-day, in order that he might marry another lady?"

"Mr. Roper marry another lady?"

"Yes."

"He wouldn't do it."

"But a man can't go on waiting forever."

"Archy Roper can."

"But."

"Why don't you tell me what you want to?—you who are so frank."

Patty looked into Jane's face with her calm eyes, resuming her natural manner, and speaking in measured accents.

"Lay your head on my shoulder, and I will whisper it into your ear."

She took Patty into her arms, and told her of Kerman's return, his proposal to her, the explanation, and their engagement to be married. Then, all blushes, and with tears in her eyes, she waited for Patty's reply.

"Well," said Patty, 'I had begun to guess at it; your heart beat so, and you looked so happy. All I can say is, I would not have given him up to any one else."

"You do give him up? You won't grieve about it?"

"What is the good?"

"My dear Patty!' exclaimed Jane, kissing her again. "What will you do? Make poor Roper happy, eh? Will you?"

"I don't know about making him happy—I'll marry him now."

"Are you glad or sorry at the news?"

"I think I am glad."

"Then you wouldn't really have liked to give up Mr. Roper?"

"No; only I wouldn't be driven. I am not a sheep to be bought and sold. It wellnigh broke my heart when Mr. Kerman showed me what a thing I was! A chattel—no better, much worse—for I threw over a man I loved for another I didn't care for, to have horses and carriages, and plenty of money. I would have married him then, when he found me out, if he had been a beggar! There!"

Patty buried her face in Jane Crosby's neck, and sobbed. Nobody had suspected the fire that burnt beneath Patty's icy and worldly manner. She had no knowledge of it herself until Kerman showed her, in the mirror of his own fine nature, the miserable object a scheming father, a foolish mother, and a keen experience of the misery of "stuck-up poverty, had made her."

"My dear, dear girl," said Jane, "you have lifted such a load off my heart! Now let me be practical. Is Mr. Roper doing well?"

"Yes, he has settled down to business, given up all connection with my father; he has done with horse-racing—I told him I would never have a husband who did the sort of speculative business my father liked. I and Archy are as humble and good as any lovers could be; I have been sorry for him."

"Kiss me, Patty! Let us be sworn friends," said Jane, embracing her again.

"That is what he said."

"Who?"

"The man who is to be your husband."

"He shall keep his word. Will you come with us to Paris—you and Mr. Roper? Perhaps we can make up a nice large party. Mr. Thompson shall telegraph for rooms. But let us return to your sister; I fear we have been a long time away."

"You must forgive me," said Jane, as they re-entered the room where Mr. and Mrs. Tavener were waiting. "Patty will explain to you by and by."

"Tell them, Jane," said Patty.

"Very well, then," said Jane; "my news has grown since I took Patty away to talk to her. Two marriages are to take place shortly: Mr. Roper and Miss Patty Sleaford, Mr. Kerman and Jane Crosby."

The news was received with delighted surprise; and Jane and her visitors sat together for more than an hour discussing it and rejoicing over it; while Tristram Decker was rushing upon his fate in the direction of High Street, Marylebone.

CHAPTER II.

NO LONGER A VISION.

ARRIVED at the famous bank of Amschel Nathans, in St. Swithin's Lane, after some formality they were introduced into the private room of the chief, who was sitting before a pile of papers.

The banker simply nodded, and they seated themselves until he had finished a calculation upon which he was engaged. The Nathans were foremost among the rulers of the world, for the chief Powers of Europe were indebted to them.

"Your business, gentlemen?"

"Letters of credit," said Decker, presenting several documents from Harmen, of San Francisco, and Defreres, of New York.

The banker read the papers, and looked at Decker.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Messrs. Decker and Kerman?"

"I am Decker; this is my friend Kerman."

The banker bowed. "I have been expecting you."

"Indeed! we had not intimated to any one our intention of coming to Europe."

"I heard of the Decker Gulch successes," said the banker, "and yesterday's mail brought me notice of your letters of credit. I congratulate you."

"Thank you," said Decker.

"One million sterling to the credit of Decker and Kerman," said the banker; "joint account; and five hundred thousand each to John Kerman and Tristram Decker."

"That's it," said Decker.

The banker touched the bell. It was answered by a white-haired old man.

"Take the signatures for these letters of credit, Isaacs." The attendant bowed.

"This way, gentlemen," he said.

They followed him, inscribed their signatures in a ponderous volume, and returned to the private room.

"What else can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"The doctors on the other side," said Decker, "give me only five years of life. I want ten at the least."

"Yes?"

"Can you introduce me to a physician who will manage that for me?"

The banker looked at the speaker thoughtfully.

"You are ill?"

"Dying, they say," replied Decker, calmly; "dying of consumption."

"Money will do many things," said the banker.

"But not what I want?"

"I do not say that. If it could bribe Death, there would be some very old men in the City of London," said the banker, "but though the bill must be finally met, it may perhaps be renewed meanwhile—it may be renewed."

As he spoke, he sat down and wrote a note, which he handed to Decker.

"Dr. Farmington, Cavendish Square," he said, "may be able to meet your views. Give him this note."

"Thank you," said Decker.

"Any other matter in which I can serve you?"

"No, sir."

"Good-morning," said the banker, bowing. "Isaacs will send cheque-books and pass-books to your hotel. You have also letters to Bartons?"

"Yes."

"Neighbors of mine, and a most reliable firm. It is not every day, even in London, that accounts like yours are opened at the two great houses. I have ventured to give Farmington a hint on that score. You cannot take his head like an Oriental monarch should you fall ill; but you can endow him with a subsidy as long as you live."

"Thank you, sir; I shall act upon your hint."

They next had an interview with the Bartons, equally quiet and unpretentious on both sides, though Mr. Barton, it must be confessed, accepted the letter as if the bank as a

rule only dealt in millions, and knew nothing of smaller sums. Decker asked what were the two best Stocks in which to invest.

"United States Bonds and English Consols," Mr. Barton replied, paying a tribute to Decker's nationality by putting American scrip first.

Next, they drove to Dr. Farmington, who promised Decker his full ten years, and more, on the condition of his advice being obeyed, and arranged for Decker to call next day to dinner, when they would talk as friends outside the restraints of the consulting-room.

It was four o'clock by the time they reached High Street, Marylebone. Mr. Moses Aaron himself came to the door to receive them. "Two customers," he thought, "and for something more important than stuffed birds."

"We want to find Mr. Brayford," said Kerman.

"Certainly. Yes, by all means," said Aaron, ringing the bell at the private door. "That is the entrance to Mr. Brayford's offices."

The summons was answered at once, and Kerman and Decker, threading the mazes of the Emporium, which climbed to the very attics in relays of oak chests, vases, armor, wardrobes, china, pictures, came at last to the door of Brayford & Co. Kerman rung and knocked. Brayford, with a quill pen behind his ear, bustled to the door and opened it. He looked at Kerman inquiringly, and curiously at Decker.

"Don't you know me?" Kerman asked.

"Know you! Yes," exclaimed Brayford, the moment he heard Kerman's voice; "of course I know you."

He grasped Kerman's hand heartily.

"Though you are a good deal disguised," he continued.

"Disguised?" said Kerman.

"Beard and moustache; why, you look like the pictures of one of our royal princes. But come in, come," he said, adding, "This is your friend, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Kerman, smiling. "I have brought him all the way from the United States to see you."

Brayford looked round as if waiting for the stranger's name, but Kerman at that moment noticed the Wonner, who sat on a tall stool at a tall desk, engrossed in an examination of a morning paper, from the front page of which he was making notes.

"Ah, Mr. ——" said Kerman.

"Mr. W.," said the Wonner, with a vacant smile.

"Yes, of course, Mr. W., how do you do?"

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. W., nodding towards Brayford as much as to say, "He's the clever one, it's no good talking to me."

When Kerman turned round, Tristram Decker was making advances to a pretty little boy who had toddled towards him, looking up at him with large blue eyes, something like his own, and long brown hair.

"How do, little one?" said Decker, stooping until he was on a level with it, face to face.

"Do, do," replied the child, halting a few yards from him.

"I am very well," said Decker, smiling.

"Wery well?" said little Willie.

"Yes, just entered on a new lease of life with one of your English doctors, and I'm very fond of little children."

"See Willie's noo soos," said the child, lifting a little foot in a red boot.

"Very pretty," said Decker; "come to me and let me feel it."

"No, no," replied little Willie.

"Yes, yes," said Decker; "I think you and I might be great friends; you are the first little boy I have spoken to in England."

"'Ittle boy," said the child.

"Yes; will you come and be my little boy?"

"Mamma's 'ittle boy," replied the child, his blue eyes still fixed on Decker's face.

"Oh, you are mamma's little boy?"

"Is, mamma's."

"If your mamma is only as sweet as you are," said Decker, looking up at Kerman and Brayford, "your papa ought to be very proud of you both."

Brayford shrugged his shoulders, and sighed.

Little Willie advanced a step towards Decker, who took out his watch, and held it up.

"Come to me, and I'll give you this."

"Tick, tick," said Willie.

"Yes," said Decker, undoing the chain, and putting it, watch and all, in a heap upon the floor, "come and fetch it. I will give it to you in return for the happy memories you have awakened."

Willie laughed and pretended to advance, but still held back.

"I had a sister," he said, turning toward Kerman; "she died when she was three years old; she was the image of this little one. I had no other sister or brother. You can imagine that I was fond of the little girl. Strange I should find her counterpart in these eyes, that odd, grave little mouth, and this long brown hair."

"Willie's mother is an American," said Brayford; but the observation escaped Decker, for at that moment Willie ran straight into his arms, and Decker kissed the little face, and then, lifting up the child, sat him on his knee and dropped the watch and chain into the boy's lap.

"Now you two old friends have your talk while we two new friends discuss the works of this chronometer."

While Decker opened his watch, and exhibited its machinery to the child, Brayford and Kerman sat down at the other end of the room.

"And what's the news, Brayford?" asked Kerman. "You are the first man I have sought out."

"The first man," said Brayford, emphasizing "man."

"Not the first woman; no, Harry, no."

"Whom have you seen?"

"Why, whom should I have seen?"

"Not her," said Brayford; "though you look as happy as if you had, and further, as if you'd made it all up. Jack and Jill fell out upon a summer's day, Jill was ill, and Jack he ran away; but when the pie was open, the birds began to sing, and all went merrily along as happy as a king—eh?"

The Wonner laughed to himself as he spotted a ducal obituary notice, and remarked,—

"Oh, isn't he clever!"

"Just so," said Kerman, laughing; "I have seen her, Brayford, this very morning."

"Who? What, Miss Crosby?" asked Brayford, beaming.

"Yes."

"And you know everything?"

"Everything."

"And you've squared it?"

"Yes."

"It's all right between you; and you know all?"

"Just so," said Kerman.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Brayford. "The bells shall ring, and the cats shall sing, and we won't go home till morning, Mr. W.!"

The Wonner turned round and smiled.

"A holiday, sir! Away you go, sir. Enjoy yourself. Here's a shilling for you!"

The Wonner dropped from his seat.

"Good as he's clever," he said, taking the shilling; "clever as he's good."

Nodding at Kerman, he took his hat and cloak from the wall, and trotted out of the room.

"Now, look here, Mr. Kerman," said Brayford, "you see that child?"

"Yes."

Willie was riding hard to "Hickory bockery boo, a horse without a shoo." The horse was Decker's knee, and Decker was making a poetical and vocal accompaniment to the gallop.

"You've a rival in my American friend. He's a poet, too," said Kerman.

"Ah, I'm only a doggrel-monger," said Brayford; "and I've got into the habit of amusing these two children, the two W.s—little Willie and the Wonner, both children, old W. the biggest child of the two. And did she tell you about forbidding the banns?"

"No, no; Jabez Thompson explained it."

"Ah, that's her child, the poor, dear love,"

"Whose child?"

"Mrs. Tom Sleaford's, or Mrs. Gardner's, whichever her name is. Ah, Mr. Kerman, one of the best and most loveable women in the world; and clever, too. Lor' bless you, she has the instincts and the tastes of the best lady in the land. Old Aaron, who is looked upon as a Great Mogul in the art way, he actually consults her on these things. We didn't know what she could do until the other day. Here we were putting her to address envelopes, and all the time she was an artist, a painter, and musician. We didn't know it, she's so modest; but one day she tried a piano, and another she said something about a picture that Aaron thought a great deal of, and he found her out. Mrs. Aaron found out her heart; he found out her head; and now, instead of sitting here writing envelopes, she's in a room to herself, painting. She's done Mr. Moses Aaron as one of the Apostles, and Mrs. Aaron a portrait. Well

they are splendid; and we've all got one ambition now, to get Aaron, the Apostle, into the Academy. And little Willie, there, is her child?

"I owe you and her a debt of gratitude too deep for words," Kerman said. "She shall have her picture in the Academy, if money can do it; and if it can't, she shall have an academy of her own,"

Brayford smiled, as much as to say, "The same dear, reckless, generous simpleton as of yore."

"No, I am not talking nonsense," continued Kerman, noticing Brayford's expression of incredulity and amusement; "and I want to ask a favor of you, Brayford."

"Yes; ask and have, if it is in my power to comply."

"I want a private secretary."

"You do?"

"Yes. The work will be light, but I'll make it up in salary."

Brayford laughed.

"I've no salary now. You'll double it, I suppose, as they say on the stage."

"I will give you a thousand a year to begin with," said Kerman; "and here's your first half-year in advance."

He took a five hundred pound note from his pocket, and held it out to Brayord.

"No, no; you're joking," he said. "It's a property note—a Bank of Elegance, eh? Ah, you've come back a wag!"

"Brayford," said Kerman, gravely, "you don't want to insult me?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Listen, then. First take that note."

Brayford took it, and looked anxiously at Kerman.

"I am a rich man. The note is no more to me than a sovereign used to be. I liked you in the old days. I am under an obligation to you now that I can never repay, and I like you none the less. Will you be my friend, my secretary, steward, or whatever you like to call it,?"

"Will I?" exclaimed, Brayford, rising. "My dear Mr. Kerman, I'd have been that to you for fivepence a year for that matter, if you couldn't have afforded any more, and I could have lived on it and pensioned Mr. W."

"It is a bargain, then?"

"It is; yes, indeed it is."

They had not heard a tap at a door in a corner of the

room opposite the one at which they had entered. Nor had they noticed the door open, and a woman standing there, a palette and brushes in her hand. Her black eyes were fixed upon Decker and the child on his knee. They only knew she was there when she dropped the palette. Then they saw her transfixed, spellbound.

"Hush, don't notice her," said Brayford. "She is like that sometimes."

"Mamma!" cried little Willie, joyfully, and scrambling from his imaginary horse to the floor.

Decker turned his face in the direction indicated by the child's glance and cry.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "Caroline!"

He rushed towards her, but not in time to catch her in his arms. She had fallen at his feet.

BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I.

THE GOLDEN KEY.

Blow, bitter eastern wind! Tristram Decker cares no longer to lengthen his days! His dream is over. He does not want those extra ten years of life. He will go no more to Cavendish square. Even the five years allotted to him by the American physicians are now more than he asks. One year alone may fufil his desire. Tear down the blossoms, shrivel the young leaves, unnatural wind, blowing upon the tender buds of May! Thy sting is not so keen as the poisoned tooth which has lacerated the heart of Tristram Decker!

The biting east wind cut its way through the London streets just as the metropolis had put on its summer gear.

It blew as if it came from the heart of an iceberg. It sent the dust whirling through every avenue in sharp, wounding gusts. Mayfair hurried home in its carriages to put on its sealskin jackets. St. Giles crouched in its rags by fireless hearths and beneath merciless archways. The trees in the parks and squares shivered in the cruel tempest.

The searching remorselessness of the wind made havoc with the consumptive and the weak, and it pinched the lips and shrivelled the faces of the strong. The apple-blossoms in the suburbs fell in showers from the trees. A shivering ripple ran along the river. Tristram Decker felt a chilly spasm as this winter-in-summer wind impregnated the atmosphere of his luxurious chambers in Pall Mall East.

He had insisted upon having his own rooms and living by himself. Kerman had remonstrated. Decker had replied, "Your path is strewn with roses; I will not put thorns into it". Decker had answered Kerman that it was best for all of them that he should live his own life in London; Kerman his. "I am Nemesis," he had said, in his dramatic way "you are Good Fortune. To know that you are happy in your love will give me a passing pleasure; my everlasting disappointment and sorrow would be a daily blight upon your happiness"

And so it came to pass that, within a week after their arrival in London, Decker had his own rooms and his own plans apart from his companion; and the last day of May finds him entering upon his first experience of the English climate, which enables the historian to impress upon the reader the condition of Decker's feelings when describing the cruelties of the east wind as bearing no comparison for bitterness with the wounds which his pride, his love, and his hopes have received.

To him enters on this day of the triumph of the east wind a stranger, a pale, well-dressed man of forty or fifty, a courtly person, with cold gray eyes and white hands.

"Monsieur Favart, I believe?"

"At your service sir."

"Be seated."

Monsieur Favart, his hat and eane in hand, sat near the fire in response to Decker's invitation. The American in a warm velvet dressing gown, was engaged at a desk near the fireplace.

"You are strongly recommended to me by Baron Nathan the banker."

Monsieur Favart inclined his head affirmatively; Monsieur Favart did not waste words.

"He tells me you have seen service under several governments."

Monsieur Favart bowed again.

"As a spy."

"Sir!" exclaimed monsieur, "the baron did not send me here to be insulted."

He rose from his seat.

"No" said Decker, unmoved, "but that we may thoroughly understand each other. Don't be offended, Monsieur Favart."

"Monsieur is somewhat coarse in his speech," replied Favart still standing. "I am not used to that mode of address."

"Pardon me, I am a citizen of the United States, and over there we call things by their right names, and don't palaver about business. Pray be seated; put your hat nad stick down. If I am uncouth I am rich and I can substitute courtesy with gold."

Monsieur Favart put his hat and cane upon the floor, and resumed his seat.

"You are a Jew?"

"I was born in Brussels; I have lived in all countries."

"You know London well?"

"Every inch of it."

"The baron tells me that, like the Swiss mercenaries of France and Rome, you don't care much for whom you fight until you are enlisted, engaged, and paid, and then you are devoted heart and soul to your chief."

"Monsieur le Baron has been frank."

"You have served under him?"

"Many times."

"You like to continue in his favor?"

"That is true."

"He is anxious that you should serve me.

Monsieur bowed.

"I want a slave."

"Sir!" exclaimed Monsieur Favart," it is plain you do not want me."

"I want," continued Decker, "a shrewd, clever,unscrupulous man, gentlemanly in style, accustomed to all societies, to all countries—a keen, shrewd person, who has had experience of criminals of all classes, from the king on his throne

who declares an unholy war, to the common thief who picks a pocket; I want such a man to be my slave, to hunt for me in human hives, to track down a thief and lay him bound at my feet. Such a man can count upon the highest pay that spy or agent even received from king or commoner. Look!"

Decker opened a drawer in a safe that stood by his elbow. It was full of sovereigns. He opened another which was full of notes. He opened another that flashed the radiance of diamonds.

"I will be your slave," said Favart.

"Very well,' replied Decker, closing the drawers ; "fix your own terms: don't be afraid ; I mean business."

"Four hundred pounds a month."

"Make it eight," said Decker.

"And expenses?"

"Certainly."

"Monsieur is too good; I have only one condition."

"Name it."

"We discharge the word "spy" from our vocabulary."

"Very well, to me you are henceforth Monsieur Favart ; I am Tristram Decker, your chief. Is that agreeable?"

"Most agreeable."

"You will live here."

Favart bowed.

"I have ordered rooms to be furnished for you above my own. Anything you want that you don't find there, order and charge to your expenses, on account of which I have paid two thousand pounds to your credit at Nathan's."

"Sir, you are more than princely."

"I can afford it. Now to business. On the date set down in this summary of events," said Decker, handing him a paper, "William Graham Denton, a distinguished citizen of the Southern States of America, was said to have been killed at the Lingham railway-depot. I want the facts, particulars of the inquest and burial. A young man named Sleaford—Tom Sleaford, an Englishman—and a girl, the daughter of Mr.Denton, travelled with the deceased. This Tom Sleaford lured the girl away to a house he had in the Vale of Essam; she was ill, suffering from the shock of her father's death. One day he took her thence under the pretence of marrying her. She thought he took her to London. It is suspected that he took her to the nearest large city, and there is a doubt whether he married her or not; if he did, it was a civil contract at a place called a Registry Office. I

want to know whether he married her, and where, and you must get me a copy of the certificate. If it is necessary to employ other detective agencies than your own, employ them. There is a woman named Migswood who lived at The Cottage; it is thought she is in London. She can assist you. Let me know where she is."

Decker paused, and sighed deeply.

"You are ill," said Favart.

"Don't mind me. If I am ill, know that your successful accomplishment of my wishes is the best medicine I can have."

"Sympathy, as well as interest, bind me to your service."

"Begin, then; let me have all this information within the week."

Monsieur Favart had no sooner left the room than a short, thickset, round-headed man entered.

"Davings! Ah, I'm glad to see you," said Decker; "it does one good to see an American face."

"Thank you, general," replied Davings, turning in his mouth a quid of tobaco. "I went to the hotel; they sent me here."

"When did you arrive?"

"At Liverpool, yesterday."

"I want you to take charge of this place and look after me, look after my clothes, order my dinners, see to my drinks——"

"And boss around generally, as I used to for Judge Smithers in Frisco?"

"Just so."

"Keep my mouth shut, my eyes open, and grease the wheels of life."

"That's it, to the letter."

"Well, when'll I begin?"

"Now. See the housekeeper; she has my instructions."

Davings rolled out of the room as if he were treading the deck of a vessel, and disappeared.

"I shall get things into shape soon," said Decker; "it is time the lawyer came. The sight of Davings was welcome. I shall have decent food now, and proper drink. While I live, I'll live."

He drew his dressing-gown about him and walked to the windows. The dust of Pall Mall was whirling up around the statue of George the Third. His bronzed majesty looked like an officer saluting in the smoke of a field-day.

"Come in," he said, in response to a knock at the door.

The servant announced "Mr. Sparcoe."

"Good morning," said Mr. Sparcoe, who advanced with his hand behind his back, as if he were in pain.

Decker bowed.

"Sparcoe is my name. Sparcoe, of "Sparcoe & Bland Westminster."

Mr. Sparcoe was a small man with a nose that threatened, if the owner lived long enough, to rival the frame of Bardolph. Black hair clustered in curls about his forehead; he pulled nervously at his thick, black beard, and moustache. He had black, bright eyes, and a mouth that betokened a certain geniality of mind.

"I'm a funny man," he said. "You will excuse me; if you will let your servant bring me a little drop of whisky. I'll thank you kindly."

Decker rang and ordered the whisky.

"Thank you," said Sparcoe, when he had smacked his lips over the liquor. "I'm a funny man; but you'll excuse me, I'm sure, when I tell you I've had my back broken in three places, and my ribs cracked in all directions."

Decker looked at him inquiringly.

"Well, not exactly broken, but worse; if it had been broken I shouldn't have been here, and a lot of trouble would have been saved to a great many; for I'm a funny man, and not being able to ride any longer, it makes me irritable, and I must have my own way—must—it is life and death that I have it. But to the business which brought me here— a deed of gift I believe?"

"That's so," said Decker.

"Will you oblige me with a sheet of paper," said Mr. Sparcoe, rising, one hand upon his back, the other fidgeting with his beard, which he seemed every now and then to be plucking out by the roots.

"Thank you," said Sparcoe, re-seating himself at a blotting pad and paper, and taking up a pen. "I'm a funny man; though I was never at college, I can always think ever so much better with a pen in my hand and foolscap under my nose. Deed of gift. Your name, sir, in full?"

"Tristram Decker."

"Tristram Decker," wrote Sparcoe, in a large, firm hand, "late of the United States, I believe?"

"Yes."

"American citizen, and now of Pall Mall East, in the city of Westminster, in the county of Middlesex."

"My time is valuable, Mr. Sparcoe. I beg you will not detain me longer than necessary."

"Your time is not more valuable than mine," said Sparcoe, with a smile that showed a set of teeth that looked the whiter for the glowing face. "I dare say you are thinking he is a funny man, and so he is, is Ellis William Sparcoe, I can tell you, and I don't know that there is any other man in London who could have got me out of my office expect Baron Nathan; we've been in at the death together many a time when there has been a full field, and not six up at the last; but I forget, you don't understand fox-hunting in America.

"We understand business," said Decker.

"Yes, by George, you do! I ask your pardon, Mr. Decker; it is a just rebuke. I'll run this off in no time; it is a gift, *donatio mortis causa*, as the law calls it. Who is the recipient?"

"Caroline Virginia Denton, otherwise Caroline Virginia Sleaford, or Gardner."

"Married woman?"

"I don't know at present."

"Ah, sufficient if we identify her properly

This point settled, the next question was the property.

"The residue of my estate at my death, and one million sterling in the meantime, in the bonds of the Decker Gulch mines.

"Decker mines," remarked Sparcoe. "Ah, yes, read a description of them yesterday in the *Telegraph*. What a property! They say the principal mine is worth a pound a minute. By George, you are rich!"

"And yet you say your time is as valuable as mine."

"You are the Decker in question, then?"

"I am."

"Well, you will say I'm a funny man," said Sparcoe, still writing. "I shouldn't care to have so much."

"In regard to the gift prior to my death, to be made at once, to-morrow, I want the lady to think it is from her father, a sum restored to her by a Government agent in the United States, the North having destroyed his estates during the war. Do you understand?"

"She is to think this money does not come from you?"

"Yes."

"Won't she suspect when it is in Decker Gulch Bonds?"

"She is not of a suspicious nature, and the bonds will be converted by you through Nathan's, and the money deposited to her credit."

"Yes, that will do," said Sparcoe, rising. "The deed shall be sent down for your signature in a couple of hours. Bland will do the suaviter business about the source of the gift; he has a smooth way with him that will overcome any doubts. I'm not good at a lie, I should be sure to let it out. When you've lived half your life in the hunting-field, you get into the habit of calling a spade a spade. Oh, my back, my back!"

While he was still speaking, Mr. Sparcoe was crawling to the door, with his left hand on his back, and his right swinging his hat as if that particular action aided his locomotion.

"Good morning," he said, with a groan; "if you had seen me ten years ago, you wouldn't believe I could ever have limped in this way. Ah, well, the Lord Almighty has been very good to me for all that."

"Decker smiled when the next moment he heard Sparcoe exclaim in a loud voice to the servant, who had evidently been moved to render him some assistance,——

"Don't touch me! Damme, do you think I can't walk; get out with you!"

"The carriage is at the door, sir," said the servant.

"Send Davings to my bedroom."

While he dressed, Mr. Decker gave some instructions to Davings in regard to dinner, and then, handing him a card, said,—

"I have written down three addresses; tell the coachman to drive to those places in the order I have put them."

"Yes, general," said Davings, turning his quid and rolling downstairs before his master.

CHAPTER II.

DECKER'S SLAVES.

Down Pall Mall, by Trafalgar Square, amidst a crowd of dust, past the picturesque sentinels at the Horse Guards, whirling along with the east wind down Parliament Street, Decker's carriage pulled up at the Palace Hotel, where Tristram Decker was introduced for the first time to Miss Crosby.

Mr. Thompson, the Lincolnshire heiress and Kerman were waiting for his coming before they ordered luncheon to be served. He had promised to join them.

"I am so glad to see you," said Jane, beaming upon him a genial welcome. "This is my friend and guardian I may say, Mr. Jabez Thompson."

Mr. Jabez Thompson bowed stiffly to the American, whose poetic aspect, long brown hair, and sad face rather awed the Lincolnshire sportsman.

"I have to apologize for delaying the pleasure of making your friendship, Miss Crosby, but I have had a bitter disappointment since I came to London, which has occupied me in various ways; and, besides, I am an invalid, as my friend Kerman will have told you."

"Yes, he's told me all about you—indeed he talked about nobody else; if I dared I should be jealous of you," replied Jane.

"Bring up the luncheon," said Thompson, addressing a servant who entered for orders.

"Ah, Miss Crosby," said Decker, "you will never have cause to be jealous; you don't know the depth of Kerman's devotion."

Jane blushed at the thought of her own want of that particular virtue in a lover. The first Sunday after Christmas was continually cropping up in her memory.

"I think I do," she said, looking at Kerman. "I do believe you men are more constant than us poor women! But you must not forget that you were born the stronger, and that we have to carry upon our poor shoulders the curse of Paradise."

"Yes, yes," said Decker, "and we must do women the justice to remember that the tempter was the devil and that the devil is of our sex."

"Luncheon," said Thompson; "I'll lead the way."

They followed into the next room, and Decker sat near Jane.

"Did John tell you we are all going to Paris together?" she asked.

"No; he does not tell me all his secrets now."

"He says you are so much absorbed in business."

"It is true."

"Ah, great wealth is a great responsibility."

"And a great power."

"John tells me you believe it can command all things."

"I used to think so. I wish it could buy the oblivion of events we dislike. If it could blot out of memory, out of existence, two or three black years and leave a clean white page to be filled as we wish, then what a power it would be for weal or woe!"

"You have some great sorrow, John told me so, let us help you to forget it; Mr. Decker come with us to Paris."

"No, it is impossible; thank you. I have set myself some work to do which will occupy me until the end of the year, possibly; and then I shall take a long rest."

"Mr. Decker, you are not drinking," said Thompson, from the head of the table.

"Thank you, Mr. Thompson, I am getting through nicely," said the American; "the conversation of your ward is more sparkling than any champagne."

"Oh, John," said Miss Crosby, "you didn't tell me your friend was what Lincolnshire would call a gallant."

"I said he was a poet, my dear," Kerman replied, as he helped himself to plovers' eggs.

"A poet!" said Thompson to himself, "a lunatic."

"Kerman libels the laureate, Miss Crosby, when he calls me a poet. But let us talk of your plans of pleasure. When do you go to Paris?"

"When is it, John?" asked Miss Crosby.

"Ask Jabez Thompson," John replied; "he's the boss, as we should call him in America."

"At present," said the lawyer, attacking a beefsteak which had been specially cooked for him because he said he hated gimcracks, "at present. I shall be worse than a nobody soon, I expect, aged and turned out to grass for the

rest of my days, the retired performer, like a picture of that old winner of the Derby we saw yesterday."

"You don't call that answering a question, do you?" asked Miss Crosby, who was eating her luncheon with the relish of a Lincolnshire appetite.

"Oh, about Paris?" said Thompson, wiping his face with his napkin; "we shall go on Wednesday."

"It is a fine city, Paris?" observed Decker, looking at the lawyer.

"Fine enough for that matter. I've never stopped there long. I generally go over to France to see the French Derby run; its a place I soon tire of. Seems to me that Frenchmen are always thinking of going to work, and never getting beyond an eating-house."

"Come with us Tristy, old man," said Kerman.

"Impossible," replied Decker.

"You men will like to have a chat and a smoke," said Miss Crosby, rising. "I shall go into the other room and write some letters."

"And you'll excuse me," said Thompson. "My partner has a horse entered for the Derby, Mr. Decker, and I have an appointment at the Westminster Club. I'll say good-day, sir."

Decker, who, having opened the door for Miss Crosby, was standing when Mr. Thompson addressed him, bowed, and the sporting lawyer left the room in an opposite direction.

"Modest fellow, that," observed Kerman; "his partner has a horse entered for the Derby! Why, it's his own horse, and it's second favorite. Any other man would have thought that something to brag about. The race is run on Wednesday; we are going to Paris on Thursday."

"Fine old English gentleman, I suppose, eh?"

"Yes, a good old specimen."

"Don't like him," said Decker, carelessly, adding quickly, when he saw that Kerman was disappointed at the remark: "excuse me for saying so, old boy, we are used to say what we think to each other."

"Why don't you like him?"

"Because he doesn't like me. But that's nothing. Look here, Jack, old man, I'm going to drive to Lancaster Gate, Hyde Park; will you come? I want to show you something, and your friend, Mr. Brayford, is to meet me."

"Do you want to go now—at once?" asked Kerman, handing him a case of cigars and a light.

"At once," said Decker, commencing to smoke.

"All right; I'll be with you in a minute."

Kerman knocked at the door through which Miss Crosby had passed. Decker could hear him say:

"Jane, Decker wants me to drive with him to see something; business, my dear. I'll be back very soon."

"Very well, John," was the reply, and something which sounded like a hurried kiss brought Kerman back to his friend.

"Oh, Tristy! Tristy!" exclaimed Kerman, "I wish you were as happy as I am: can't it be managed, dear old friend?"

"You told that dear girl of yours that I am a poet. If to be a dreamer, a sentimentalist, to have a heart torn with jealousy, hatred, remorse, revenge, is to be a poet, I am that unhappy thing, Jack. If I were a philosopher, or a clod, or something between your friend Thompson and a nigger, there might be hope; but I am Tristram Decker, and the leopard does not change its spots."

Kerman shrugged his shoulders.

"But come along, Jack, be happy yourself; don't mind me; I shall amuse myself."

They were driven to a handsome house at Lancaster Gate. A matronly woman received them. She said Mr. Brayford was writing in the library.

"Good; show us meanwhile into that little room by the conservatory."

"The morning-room?"

"Yes," said Decker.

"Sit down, Kerman," said Decker. "Madam, when I ring it will be for Mr. Brayford."

"Do you like this room?"

"Yes," said Kerman.

"Come this way."

He led his friend into a winter garden, the atmosphere laden with the perfume of a cloud of exotic blooms. The conservatory opened upon a drawing-room, panelled in quilted satin, and furnished in ebony and gold. They passed through corridors lined with costly paintings. They came to a dining-room, the picture of old English elegance and simplicity.

"We won't disturb Brayford in the library," said Decker,

leading the way to the morning-room. "What do you think of the house?"

"It is a palace," said Kerman; "what's the meaning of it?"

"A penitent Federalist, who took part in the war against her father, has settled it upon William Graham Denton's daughter, as some return for the loss and misery that cruel business has caused her."

"Indeed!" said Kerman. "I know that Federalist, the dear fellow!"

"But you must not know him, Jack," said Decker, earnestly; "that is my secret."

"I will not let it out," replied Kerman, putting out his hand, which Decker gripped with unusual warmth.

"It is a great blessing, anyhow, to have a friend like you, Jack," he said; "we will ring for Brayford now."

Brayford, in gray trousers, a frock coat, and plum-colored necktie that hid itself beneath his stubby beard, entered, hat and gloves in his hands.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he said, with a solemn air.

"How is Mrs. Gardner to-day?" Decker asked.

"Better, sir, much better, I am glad to say; and the toys you sent to Master Willie; well, there he's a ridy-cock-horsing to Banbury-crossing as if he were a little royal prince."

"And you have been over the house, Mr. Brayford?"

"Yes, sir; it's something too lovely. I feel as if I were dreaming."

"And is Mr. Moses Aaron willing to be one of the trustees?"

"Willing!" said Brayford, "he is overcome with the honor of it."

"Then you will kindly tell your solicitor to complete the settlement to-morrow, for the American Minister is anxious that Mrs. Gardner should come here at once and live in a style worthy of her position and the wealth which her father was deprived of through the war."

"Yes, sir, thank you, I'll do so at once; and The Wonner, Mr. Decker, he prefers to continue where he is and go on cutting out the obituaries, and Mrs. Aaron she will pay him a pound a week regular as arranged, and I shall visit him two or three times a week, please God, and the business will go on all right, I'm sure."

Decker looked impatiently at the door.

"Yes, good-day, sir, or *au revoir*. I will see that the deed is ready by the time named."

"I want you to lend me this secretary of yours," said Decker, when Brayford had gone.

"Do what you like with him," said Kerman; "I've nothing for him to do."

"Come, then, we will go to Gilton's, the American bank. He promised to procure for me, from a friend of his, a colored butler of most reliable character, whom he would induce a friend of his to part with, under the interesting circumstances I put before him. I want to know if he has been successful. The Federalist who is interested in Denton's daughter learns that an old favorite colored woman, who was a nurse in Denton's family, is in New York, and he has cabled for her. His idea is to give the lady a pleasant surprise."

They left the carriage at Gilton's, ascended a narrow staircase, and entered a sort of counting-house, where several United States' citizens were smoking, and poring over files of American newspapers.

"Step in here, sir," said Gilton, chewing the end of a cigar, which he was also smoking. "It is all O. K., as these Britishers say; you can have Julius Brutus when you like."

Thank you, that's good," said Decker. "Any news from New York?"

"The critter's on her way; steamer'll be in latter end of next week."

"That's smart," said Decker.

"The way Giltons do their business, general."

"You will find me liberal," said Decker.

"Guess I know that well enough."

"I wish you good day," said Decker.

"The same to you, general," said Gilton.

"I'm going home now, Jack," said Decker; "you want to go to your hotel?"

"Yes, and I'll walk; you've put my head in such a whirl with your kind thoughts, and your smartness, and your strange ways, and one thing and another, that a walk will do me good,"

"As you wish; acquaint me with your movements. This wind is sharp enough to shave a man. Good-by."

"Pall Mall," he said to the coachman, who smiled because Decker pronounced the words as they were spelt;

and Decker's chestnut dashed up to the door before Kerman had crossed Trafalgar Square.

"Hain't'e a stunner!" said the coachman to his son, who officiated as footman, when Decker had dismissed him for the remainder of the day, saying,—

"I shall not want your father or yourself until to-morrow. Davings wait on me: go and enjoy yourself; here are a few dollars to do it with,"

"Hain't 'e a stunner, 'Ennery James; a hexample to we Britishers, as 'e calls us, though he do say 'Paul Maul,' and calls two arf sovs dollards. 'Ennery James, we air in luck; we'll dress ourselfs hup and go to the club, that we will.'

'Ennery James, and his father thus being off duty, it devolved upon Davings to wait upon the general, as he called Decker, for the remainder of the day and night.

"Bring me a champagne cocktail, Davings, my man," said Decker, gasping for breath as he leaned against the mantelshelf of the room in which he lived, wrote and ate; for he was content to occupy only a couple of rooms, with bath and ante-chamber *en suite.*

Davings had already converted the ante-room into a sort of private American bar, in which he concocted iced drinks of various kinds, and kept a stock of champagne always cold.

"Guess you ain't looking well," said Davings, with that easy familiarity which is characteristic of the relationship that generally exists between an American gentleman and his confidential servant.

"I am tired."

"Why don't you rest? What call have you got to go worrying around like a Wall Street broker; you don't want to make no money?" said Davings, handing him a tempting looking glass of pale, ruby-colored liquor.

"No, I want to spend it, Davings,' replied Decker, drinking.

"Well, I guess you've got to the right place, for cuss me if they don't charge you for lookin" at a store in this town."

"That's as good a cocktail as I ever drank, Davings."

"Well, the wine's good; I'll say that for these Britishers, they sell tiptop wine," replied Davings, tossing up the empty glass and catching it.

"What time did I say for dinner?"

"Six; and I guess, general, a gentleman need have a gold mine if he's to eat oysters every day in this town, and when you've paid for them their weight in copper, blame me if they don't taste of the metal itself."

"Cable to New York for a regular supply of Blue-points, and anything else that's useful, Davings, and don't trouble me about trifles; there are three steamers a week from New York; I want to live in London as if I were in New York, with all the luxuries procurable here in addition."

"Yes, sir: and it's a pity you can't do closer justice to them; but no doubt your appetite will get better, and I guess you'll be having friends to help you."

"That will do, Davings."

"Right, general," was the quick response, as Davings sheered off with a lurch to starboard.

"Davings!"

"General," said Davings, pulling himself together, and standing at attention.

"Is chewing a great comfort to you?"

"No; and it's a cursed dirty habit."

"Give it up, Davings; give it up."

"It's given up general."

Davings went away to bring the dinner. Tristram Decker opened his letters. There was one from Mr. Sparcoe, the proclaimed funny man, who appeared to be also a clever man; for he wrote to say that he had delayed the deed of gift on his own responsibility to suggest the addition of a clause settling the money upon the recipient, exclusively for her own use, tied up in such a way that no other person could touch it. Decker approved, and filled up a telegraphic form to that effect, giving two names as trustees if required, and appointing a time for signing the document. Sparcoe had earned the respect of Decker for this bit of worldly and legal thoughtfulness. Decker employed Brayford's lawyer for the work of settling the house at Lancaster Gate. He did not choose that the situation should be commanded by any single firm. Jeremiah Sleaford wrote, in his own hand, to thank Tristram Decker, Esq., for his deposit of five hundred pounds, and appointing a meeting at the West End Bank of Deposit. A note from the American Embassy stated that they had arranged with Scotland Yard to place a smart and discreet detective at his service during his short stay in London, to inspect

the city, and inquire into its criminal and other phases of life.

By the time Decker had finished dinner, and drawn his chair to the fire on this chilly announcement of the English summer, Mr. Topper Wingfield was announced.

"From Scotland Yard," said a sporting-looking gentleman, with mutton-chop whiskers but an otherwise closely shaven face.

"Yes; take a seat."

"I'm placed at yore service as long as yo want me," said Mr. Topper Wingfield, with a smack of the Lancashire dialect in his speech and a certain Northern brusqueness in his manner.

"You know who I am?"

"T. W.'s on it," replied Mr. Wingfield.

Mr. Wingfield tapped his prominent nose with the forefinger of his right hand. It was a remarkable nose, an organ which, regarded from a friendly point of view, looked as if it was fully entitled to the confidence which its owner reposed in it. A stout yet pliable nose, it looked straight ahead: it did not turn up, it did not turn down; it was not thin and inquisitive; it did not end in a sharp point: it was a capable nose, that appeared to be looking into things always; not a mere inquisitive, prying nose, but an investigating nose, a judicial, inquest-loving nose. It had saved Mr. Topper Wingfield in many a trying case, under many singular and difficult circumstances. No wonder he patted it in a confidential and affectionate way; no wonder his two small eyes, planted rather closely at the base of it, looked down admiringly upon it from their cool, shady depths. It was a most requisitive, catethetical, scrutinizing, discriminative, probative, judicial nose. Nobody had had better evidence of this reliability than Mr. Wingfield, to whom that accurate and profound nose was a familiar adviser and friend, known to him as "T. W.," his second self, and of which his remark, "T. W.'s on it," was by Scotland Yard always understood to mean that the question under discussion was received as clear in demonstration and comprehension by Mr. Topper Wingfield and the honorable member already described.

"Oh, T. W.'s on it, is he?" remarked Decker, lighting a cigar; "is that T. W.?" tapping his own nose.

"That's T. W.," said Wingfield, laying his own forefinger upon his own proboscis.

"Very well, Mr. Wingfield; if you and T. W. can spare half an hour, we will come to business."

"Nay, there's no 'if' about it; I'm your servant, sir, in all that's reasonable and discreet: such were my commands; so you've gotten to give orders, and I've gotten to obey."

"Is that it?"

"That's it. Minister down at Embassy said you'd be sure to act liberal in the way of expenses and what not; so I leave all that to you. And now sir, if yo please, drive on."

"Do you smoke?"

"Yes, sir."

"And drink?"

"I do."

"Will you help yourself?"

"Thank you."

"You are not a Londoner?"

"I'm Lancashire."

"You seem to have as many dialects in England as we have in America?"

"Yo musn't reckon to beat us in everything."

"No, so I perceive."

Decker smiled. He liked his new acquaintance at once.

"Have you been long in the London police force?"

"Twenty years."

"You must have had some strange experiences."

"Ah, you may say that."

"What is the most remarkable case in which you were ever engaged?"

"The Longville poisoning case."

"Poisoning?" said Decker. "Was it a murder?"

"If there ever was one; and the poisoners are walking about now."

"How is that?"

"The jury wouldn't convict; the medical evidence was conflicting."

"What was the case?"

"A French lady of position poisoned her husband; there was a go-between in the shape of a lady companion; and the lady had a lover who was a foreign doctor."

"Yes, well?"

"The two women were tried; they got off."

"Why?"

"The doctors couldn't agree whether, the man being in a peculiar state of health, some medicine which he had taken, not being a poison in a criminal sense, had done his business or not. They couldn't get at the doctor, though I make no doubt he doctored him into the state of health that was necessary. He was the cheekiest lot I ever come across; a regular knowing old Mossoo as you could wish to see. They called him as a witness, and under cross-examination he said he would undertake to poison anybody, and defy every analytical test; and what's more, he could imitate disease so well that any practitioner would give a regular certificate of death."

"Strange evidence to be given publicly, that."

"Judge said as much, and snubbed him."

"I should like to read the report of the trial; can you get it?"

"Oh yes. This is the best drop of brandy I ever tasted," said Wingfield, holding up his glass and looking admiringly at the liquor.

"What was the fellow's name?"

"The doctor's?"

"Yes."

"Dampez; Dr. Dampez."

"Dr. Dampez," responded Decker reflectively, "does he live in London?"

"No doubt."

"Will you get me his address?"

"Yes," said Wingfield, taking out a pocket-book and making a note.

"Bring it me to-morrow, with the report of a trial."

"I will."

"I have several secret missions in London," said Decker; "two of them I entrust to you. But I must have close, faithful, and confidential service. I shall pay you better than ever you have been paid in your life."

"Will that be confidential also?" asked Wingfield, taking out a pocket-book.

"Quite—close and inviolable."

"It's always best to have a clear understanding at first." said Wingfield, laying his finger caressingly upon his nose.

"That's T. W.'s view?"

"To a T," said Wingfield, helping himself to brandy.

"Very well," said Decker, taking out a pocket-book and

handing the officer a bank-note, "take that as an earnest of my good intentions."

Wingfield looked at it and then at Decker.

"Honor bright, no kid, as we say in London, 'Janak,' as we say in the North?"

Decker nodded.

"It's too much, sir; but 'Merican millionaires are said to be more liberal than the English breed, and I thank yo. I'll try and earn it; but would you kindly give it me in five-pun notes; wouldn't do for me to be changing a sum like that; I'd have my own pals set to watch me, if that got aired."

Wingfield handed the note back to Decker.

"I will have it changed for you; the notes shall be ready for you when you bring me that report and address to-morrow."

"Thank yo, sir."

"We will now come to our first item of business," said Decker. "Do you know Miss Weaver's Retreat?"

"It's been through my hands: she's a clever 'un, is Weaver; but there's a many of her sort."

"Yes?"

"Lives on rich fools who think they are helping the poor. It's a trade in London; they call it charity-mongering."

"I want that institution busted, as we say in the States, and Miss Weaver and Major Wenn sent to the Tombs."

"The tombs?"

"To prison."

"That's Mr. Sparcoe's craze."

"Sparcoe's?"

"Yes, the lawyer; but he won't spend money on it, else he could have done the job long ago."

"Sparcoe shall meet you to-morrow at eleven, when you bring the address and the report. You shall arrest Weaver and Wenn; I'll pay the bill."

"That's business, T. W., if you like," said Wingfield.

"You understand?"

"T. W.'s on it," said Wingfield.

"Does T. W. know a person named Fitzherbert Robinson?"

"A financier and a speculator in the City?"

"Yes, a sort of swell, I believe you would call him in London."

"Cool, downy cove, who puts side on, and was in the Hampstead Cemetery swindle"

"I see you know him."

"A cruel party about women; brags of things as would make a Lancashire lad's clogs rattle about his shins—one of those prowling beasts as deludes silly young gals and leagues with bad old un's."

"I want him in gaol, ironed, and when he's convicted I want to tell him why; if he was in America, I'd shoot him; but you make a fuss about carrion here, and I can't afford to waste time."

Decker's face flushed, and he rose nervously to his feet.

"We Americans, Mr. Wingfield, love our country; we are more patriotic than any people under the sun—we are a united nation on that platform. This Robinson has grossly insulted, and would have brutally wronged, a countrywoman of mine. If I had time, and it was convenient, I would shoot him. He is one of your London sharks, a swindling thief. When he is committed on a substantial charge, I want an order to see him; and there is another note, which can be turned into smaller ones, waiting for the time when you can tell me he is laid by the heels."

"Thank yo! I'll nick the beggar; he deserves it," said Wingfield.

"And now, good-night," said Decker. "If you have an intimate friend in your own line whom I could employ in a smaller matter, send him to me between now and twelve o' clock—reliable, shrewd, experienced, and with a knowledge of lodging houses and slums. I go to bed at half past twelve. My man will be up till twelve."

"His name will be Buncher—Jim Buncher—safe and downy as a ferret in a rabbit-hole. He'll be here at 10.30 sharp. T. W. knows where to drop on him at 10.15. Good-night, sir."

"The business is all straight and clear, eh?"

"As a die," replied Wingfield; "T. W.'s on it."

He tapped T. W. briskly, as much as to say, "Now, then, wake up, and bid the gentleman good-night;" adding aloud, "Good-night, sir, and thank you, sir. To-morrow at eleven."

Decker walked to the door, and heard Davings showing T. W. out before he closed it.

Then, pacing the room slowly to and fro, his hands

clenched, his eyes flashing, he spoke to himself of his plans.

"Not a soul who ever injured her, not a single British thief of them, shall escape. I'll have every murdering 'coon of them under my heel. A pretty harmless child, a stranger so lovely that their pink and white beauties fade into nothing before her, an innocent, unsuspecting lamb to be worried and torn by these London wolves before she had fairly landed! By heaven! if I had never known her, I'd fall on them like an Indian, and cleave their cowardly hearts. But to have loved her as I have! Lord, Lord, I wonder that there is a drop of patience in my soul! If I had found her married and happy, the charm of some peaceful home, the gentle spirit of one of those pleasant English hearths I've heard so much about, I think I could have looked in upon her unseen, and blessing her, gone down to my grave without asking even a friendly adieu from her sweet lips. But to find her a victim to the lust and licence of a libertine, left a waif on the streets, a fugitive from a den in Porter's Buildings, a lamb who fled from a she-wolf to run the risk of worse treatment at the hands of Fitzherbert Robinson; to live at last on the charity of strangers! Poor unhappy soul! and she loved me all the time, and cried aloud for me! I knew it. Did not her very agony make itself heard over sea and land, till it fell upon me in the mountains? Did not her childlike face tell me so when I lifted her up and she opened her eyes, lying in my arms in that poor but hospitable room? Shall I ever forget those heart-searching words, "Tristram Decker, I knew you were coming to save me; I knew it!" Ah, Caroline! if there were some drug of drowsy, dreamy power that could enshroud these last few years, and give us to each other as we were when first I saw you, a rosebud on a knotted stem, that put out thorns against me, thorns behind which you crept for shelter when I stretched out my hand!"

He sat down in an easy rocking-chair before the fire.

"What a happy fate ours might have been!" he thought, as he swayed himself to and fro. "Wealth, and Love, and Health, what a Trinity! Wealth I have, Love I had; but the temple is desecrated, the idol is broken. Health! Well, the absence of that last necessity to human happiness, after all, only compels me to crowd my work into a closer space; it brings punishment and reward the quicker. I will play

the two together—Vengeance and Mercy, and she shall be the Lady Bountiful when I'm gone."

"It's Buncher, sir, Jim Buncher," said a voice in the midst of a pleasant dream, which had peopled a short sleep with bright fancies.

Decker breathed hard, and then woke up. Davings was standing near him.

"Guess I'm sorry to wake you, but this gentleman said his business was important."

"Yes; it's Buncher, Jim Buncher, friend of Mr. Topper Wingfield, sir," said a stolid-looking man in a black suit of clothes and a white neckerchief.

"Quite right; leave Mr. Buncher with me, Davings—I shall not keep him five minutes. Take a seat, Mr. Buncher. Mr. Wingfield has told you that I am a liberal paymaster?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know the low parts and slums and lodging-houses of London?"

"I do. I'm on the Scripture Reader lay just now, working Whitechapel on a charity box business; two parties in firemen's clothes, that collect among small tradespeople for Disabled Fire Brigade Fund one day, and put on white ties the next in the interest of a Home Mission."

"Very well. Do you know Porter's Buildings?"

"Rather."

"And Irish Moll?"

"Yes."

"Where is she now?"

"In prison."

"What for?"

"Robbing a young foreign lady."

"Do you remember the lady's name?"

"I got up the case against Moll, and we had a difficulty because the lady didn't appear."

"You got over it?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Miss Weaver appeared, and she said the foreign lady—Gardinger, I think, was her name—had left the Retreat with a friend of her family, and she believed had gone back to America; so we had to let her go on that. But another charge was made against her; we proved three previous convictions, and she's gone for seven years."

"Have you heard of a woman named Dorothy Migswood?"

"Can't say that I have."

Decker described her (for Mrs. Gardner had told him the whole story of her troubles from beginning to end), and a telegram of inquiry to the owner of The Cottage at Essam had been answered to the effect that Dorothy Migswood had left the neighborhood, it was believed for London.

"Now these are the facts: here are notes for fifty pounds as a retaining fee. Let me know where Migswood is, what she is doing, and all about her, within a week, and I will more than double this small fee."

"Yes, sir," said Buncher; "and Irish Moll?"

"Let her rest in peace, unless you can find her a companion in Dorothy Migswood."

"By all means," said Buncher.

"Good-night, Mr. Buncher."

"Good-night," said the gentleman who was on the Scripture Reader lay, and Mr. Tristram Decker lighted a fresh cigar and renewed his conversation with himself, walking about the room and stopping every now and then to cough violently and gasp for breath.

"Robinson in training, old Sleaford well in hand, Miss Weaver and Major Wenn in the care of Sparcoe and T. W., Buncher laying for Migswood—the ground is well occupied; the game will soon start. Mr. Philanthropical Sleaford shall talk to me of his clever son to-morrow, and tell me where he is. Mr. Topper Wingfield, I have to thank you for starting a new train of ideas. Dr. Dampez must be an interesting man. "Murder as a Fine Art" is a strangely fascinating subject in the page of De Quincey. But he was a vulgar hero after all, the English hero of the essayist. Is killing always murder? What creatures of circumstances we are! I remember when my blood froze with horror at the tortures of the Inquisition, at stories of the lingering deaths of men under the sentences of persecuting fanatics. Perhaps the war cured me of my sensitiveness about death. I think at this moment I am capable of inventing tortures for Tom Sleaford and presiding over them. But not mere physical tortures; no, for they bear no comparison with my agony. My God! how that man has tortured me! The rack, the wheel, the bastinado, they would have been soothing compared to the misery of my blighted hopes; the wretchedness of listening to that poor child's story as she

knelt at my feet and tore the confession from her bleeding heart. Why did I force it from her? I had a right to know it all, for her sake as well as my own, to justify her, to enable me to avenge my countrywoman, to pay tribute of justice to the *manes* of my own murdered love! The one great ideal of my soul, the one holy yearning of my heart, a pure, noble, all-absorbing love, slain, murdered, mangled by a selfish, heartless thief, who took an angel prisoner and bedaubed her snowy wings with pitch; my angel, the spirit of beauty and gentleness at whose feet I worshipped. O bitter, cruel, lustful ruffian! Tristram Decker is on thy track. His golden shafts shall reach thy black craven heart—selfish, lying, cowardly thief!"

"I thought you was calling me," said Davings, entering the room, and answering Decker's excited and inquiring gaze.

"No, Davings; no," said Decker, sighing.

"Guess you ain't well to-night—over working yourself," said Davings; "and you ain't got no call to do it. I reckon I'll go back to New York if you don't give it up."

"It's only for a short time, Davings. I shall not be busy very much longer. I shall finish it all up in a few weeks, Davings, and then I mean to have a long, quiet rest."

Davings looked at his master. There were tears in Decker's eyes.

"A long, quiet rest, Davings, a holiday for you, my friend, and a quiet rest and no more work for me."

CHAPTER III

THE ARROGANCE OF INFIDELITY.

THE east wind blustered down the river and spent itself at sea, and there came a breeze from the southwest blowing over London. The sun shone hot and bright and the lepers of the cruel city crawled out of their holes to bask in its beams. At night the doorstep, the parks, and the dark arches were almost warm and comfortable. The familiar resting-places of the outcast, and they who are unnumbered in the census, were luxurious under the southwest wind,

when compared with the reign of the east. The half a million of London paupers broke their bread with a grim joyousness now that the summer had come, while the twenty thousand masters of slaves in plush decorated the park with their glittering equipages. Tristram Decker opened his window and looked upon the brightness of London. He gazed at the wonderful procession. Cab and carriage, omnibus and barouche, plodding horses dragging heavy loads, prancing steeds in burnished harness; here a costermonger defiant behind a donkey; there a duke flourishing his gold-mounted whip, with a prince sitting by his side on the box of his drag; now a cart full of flowers "all a-growing, all a blowing;" then a brewer's dray with mighty horses bruising the very roadway with their clanging hoofs. On the pavements, never ceasing streams of human life, making their way to and fro like contrary flowing streams; and the glorious sun, high up in the blue heavens, flooding the human rivers with light and warmth, which a company of Household Guards flashes back in blaze of burnished gold and steel as it canters gayly by to St. James's Palace.

"A wonderful city," mused Decker," a cruel city, a scramble for wealth and pleasure; a fight for meat and drink, millions working that the few may be happy; the East, like Dives in hell, looking up to Lazarus in the West."

"What are you thinking of, Tristy?" asked Kerman, who had entered the room without disturbing his friend.

"That the Bible is a fable, and religion an invention to keep the poor in order."

"You didn't think so on that Christmas Day up in the mountains of the Sacramento?"

"I was a coward then."

"No, you were never a coward, Decker,' said Kerman, laying his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder, "and you are too good a fellow not to believe in God, by whose mercy we were so miraculously saved."

"And by whose mercy poor old Maggs and his fellows were lost," said Decker. "No, no, Jack, it's all very well; let the happy believe, let the fortunate be content to think they are in special keeping: the miserable know better."

"Tristy, you are getting into a bad way."

"No, my eyes are open. I know all about it now."

"All about what?"

"Everything. God has retired from business. I'm going to do His work."

"Decker, that is blasphemy."

"Then don't be inquisitive about my new philosophy, Jack," said Decker, looking round upon him with a sad smile.

"Tristy, Tristy, you make me feel miserable to see you so changed. You can't look up at the sun and down at the flowers and deny the Creator."

"I went out at four o'clock this morning, and I saw the first streaks of daylight struggling into the dark arches. I saw the sun trying to make its way into Porter's Buildings; and I helped a policeman to lift a woman and her child out of a hovel into a coach—they were dying of starvation, within a block or two of Lord Jorrocks', who had given a dinner the day before to a dirty Persian chief, and the cost of the flowers which decorated the table would have kept that woman and her little one for two or three years. What does your Deity say to that?"

"He promises a compensation in the next world," said Kerman, "and makes it as difficult for a rich man to get in to enjoy the everlasting bliss of heaven as it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."

"And do you believe that?"

"Don't you?"

"I think I did once. The poor get some consolation out of it. The rich don't believe it."

"Oh yes, some of the wealthiest people in England are the most pious."

"But they continue to be rich, in spite of the threat of the camel and the needle. No, no, Kerman, it's all wrong. This Christianity has been going on in full swing for over a thousand years, millions of priests and agents have worked the concern—they have cut throats and burnt at the stake for it, they have built it up and given your Deity every power that can be conceived, and all the attributes of mercy, truth, love, justice; and yet in this European centre of His greatness He lets your kings and ministers turn peasants into demons; He gives the strong the right to make war upon the weak; He lets the mighty carry fire and sword through peaceful valleys, and trample down with bloody heel the innocent and the weak—women and children, virtuous and wicked alike. Christianity is a failure, Jack. If

there is a devil, he is the individual to pray to. He seems to have all the power."

"Decker, Decker!" exclaimed Jack, "you must not talk like that. I shall get Jane to argue with you. She will put you right. Come now, let us leave religion, and talk of wordly affairs; for it's no good trying to make us believe that God did not save us; that in His mercy He did not bring us both here at the right moment—me to marry Jane, you to help and comfort Caroline. You must make it up there, dear old boy, and let us all be happy together.'

"You don't know me, Jack."

"I used to. You were always eccentric, but you are more so now."

"How?"

"You said once if you found Caroline married you would buy her. Come old friend, try and forgive her."

"Forgive her! Bless her innocent heart, I have nothing to forgive her!"

"Well, then, give up all those severe ideas about marriage. Men have shut their eyes before now, and if she is married, there are divorces to be had, and she is worth a sacrifice. If it's easy to give up religion, it ought to be no harder to give up other prejudices."

"Kerman, that is a good argument. It does credit to your head and to your heart. It's the best bit of practical philosophy I have ever heard you utter. I wish I was a fool, a good, easy-going Christian. I am not Jack. Your Deity has fixed me up as I am—wound up my machinery and set me going, and I shall finish at the point for which I am "booked," as you call it on your railways."

"Well, it's no good talking; I suppose you will do as you please?"

"As my nature pleases. I am going to humor my instincts, Jack, good or bad; and I am trying to do some work which the great Director ought to do for Himself."

Kerman tried to put his hand over Decker's mouth. The small exertion of resistance on Tristram's part set him coughing, and Davings had to be called in to administer one of his pleasant drinks.

"We go to Paris to-night," said Kerman, presently "and we shall be married on our return."

"How long do you stay in Paris?"

"About a week."

"Get married quickly, Jack; I don't want you to be postponing it while you bury me."

"Mr. Sparcoe," said 'Ennery James, who looked pale and haggard after his night's debauch.

"Don't go Jack," said Decker, "let me introduce you to a funny man."

"Ah, you had me there!" said Sparcoe, supporting his back with his left hand.

"I expected you at eleven; it is four now."

"Very sorry. I'm a funny man, you see. I met Mr. Topper Wingfield on my way, and he said he had just left you, and you wanted that Retreat business gone into; a regular old hobby of mine, that, so I went back, had all the papers looked out, gave T. W., you know his funny way, the latest tip about Weaver and Wenn—we shall have them—and sent him with the documents to apply for a warrant, which I hope he's got by this time; and there, if you wouldn't mind letting me ring for a little drop of whisky, just to steady my hand, I should thank you kindly."

The whisky being produced, Mr. Sparcoe sat down and spread some papers before him.

"I want you to sign this, Jack; it's some money that eccentric Federalist has given to Caroline, and two trustees are required; I put you down for one, Brayford the other."

Kerman took the paper up and glanced at it.

"Certainly; where do I sign?"

"Here—just there," said Sparcoe, "'I deliver this as my act and deed.' That's it."

"Then I have no more to say at present," said Decker, "except that the Retreat business is my affair, that you can have a cheque for costs whenever you like."

"You are a splendid fellow," said Sparcoe. "I'm a funny man; you are a funnier. I admire you very much. You must come home and see me under my vine and fig-tree. Will you?"

"I shall be very happy to do so, some day; but I had not finished. Do you know the Vale of Essam?"

"Yes. Good hunting district. Yes, yes."

"There is a small estate near the river, opposite the town of Essam, called The Cottage."

"I think I have heard of it."

"I want to buy it. Can you manage that?"

"I can."

"Buy it as it stands—furniture, stock and everything."

"At what figure?"

"Buy it, Mr. Sparcoe."

"Well, you are something like a client!" exclaimed Sparcoe. "It's a real pleasure to do your business. When do you want the place?"

"At once."

"All right! Is that all for to-day?" asked Sparcoe, tugging at his beard and rising from his chair.

"All, thank you."

"Then good day," said Sparcoe, muttering, as he left the room: "Well, I thought I was the funniest man out, touch and go, yes or no, make up your mind and it's done, hit or win, never counting the bars of the highest gate or asking the width of the brook behind the stiffest fence. But there, pshaw! he's the best fellow I've ever seen. Me a funny fellow! Pshaw! he leaves me miles behind."

"He's a character, eh?"

"Yes," said Kerman, smiling.

"London is not half so prosaic as some of you Englishmen fancy, now that mere picturesque vagabondage is gone by. It is full of character, just as full as it is of misery, drunkenness, cruelty and vice," said Decker.

"You talk about London as if you had known it all your life."

"I have. This little country of yours, with its mighty city and its wonderful history, its green meadows, its moss-grown antiquities, and its Thames, with the argosies of the world on its bosom, have they not a more engrossing interest for cultured Americans than the legends of Greece and Rome? Don't think that the heart of every educated American has not a corner of it set apart in which he does homage to the home of his forefathers."

"Ah, now you are beginning to talk like your old self, Tristy," said Kerman, in his frank, breezy way, "when we were companions in those long, starlight nights in California."

"Am I, Jack? Then it is time for you to go. I am not going to talk like that any more."

Decker looked at his watch.

"I have an appointment," he said, "with a man you won't care to meet. The fellow will be here in five minutes; I dare be bound he would talk religion to you by the yard, and pick your pocket when you were most impressed with his virtue."

"Tristy, it does not follow that because there are hypocrites in the world who use religion for a cloak, that Christianity is not a Divine revelation. John the Baptist was none the less true because Judas Iscariot was false."

"Jack, dear old friend, you are improving. You would soon be able to talk well from a good, sober, orthodox standpoint if you took theology in hand a little. When you are married, and I have more time on my hands, we will resume the subject; and seriously, my good fellow, I am most anxious that you should take your handsome Jane to church quickly."

"Not more anxious than I am," said Kerman. "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, and I don't want to run any more risks."

"Well, then, Jack, if she will consent, make it next week. I am going away for some time soon, and I must be at the wedding."

"Yes, indeed, you must."

"Next week, then, or I may be—ah, heaven knows where! I'm going to travel by and by."

"Far?"

"Yes. I can't go until I've seen Mr. and Mrs. Kerman starting on their honeymoon."

"And about Caroline?" Kerman asked, with a grave face, and laying his hand on his friend's arm. "Jane will expect her to be of our party."

"Where?"

"When we are married."

Decker hesitated.

"I won't be married unless that gentle, loving woman is there to give us her blessing. Remember, Decker, how much Jane and I owe to her gentle courage."

"Yes, yes."

"Do you object to her being present at the ceremony?"

"I cannot. I have not the right."

"Have you the inclination to?"

"No."

"Jane shall write to her."

"She has no master—no authority above her own."

"That's all right, then. Good-by, Tristy. Try and think better about those new opinions of yours."

"Yes, I'll try. Adieu, or better, good-by for the present, as you say we shall soon meet again. My regards

and compliments to Miss Crosby, and a word to old Thompson, if you like. Good-by."

Decker stood at the window and saw Kerman striding like an athlete across the road. He watched the manly figure until it disappeared in the distance, and he thought of the vision of Mirza and the bridge with the broken arches. "There were vultures, harpies, ravens, cormorants, upon the middle arches," he said to himself, recalling the classic English story; "there were envy, avarice, superstition, despair, love, with the like cares and passions that infest human life. And there were the fresh, green islands beyond, the mansions of good men after death; the old conceit; the everlasting human yearning for another world, something beyond the gloomy bridge and its pitfalls—the realization of an ideal of peace and happiness. Ah, well! But it was only the long, hollow valley at the foot of Bagdad, after all. And so it ends, and so it ends!"

"Mr. Jeremiah Sleaford," said the servant, ushering in that smug citizen, with his round face and his acted smile of innocence and geniality.

It was the "make-up" of the old days; the black velvet waistcoat, and tie showing a set of diamond studs, gray trousers, and a black frock coat; and he bowed with proud humility to Mr. Decker, as he handed his mourning hat and gold-headed cane to 'Ennery James, who simply deposited them upon a side table, nodding at Mr. Sleaford, as much as to say, "You haven't come to luncheon, nor to dinner, only to make a call, as I should think, and you should have kept them in your hand." But Jeremiah smiled loftily upon the ostentatious footman, and Decker returning Mr. Sleaford's ceremonious bow and "Mr.—Decker—I—believe?" with unusual formality, and motioned to a seat.

"It is a lovely morning," said Sleaford, as if he was turning the remark over on his tongue like a sweetmeat, "a lovely morning, and a great blessing, after the east wind, which is very troublesome to the poor, the sick, and the aged."

"I am desirous of placing another deposit at the West End Bank, Mr. Sleaford, and I wish to consult you about other investments."

"You are very good to give me your confidence, and I will at the same time say, and I can without arrogance, that whoever has advised you to use my bank, and consult ts humble formula, has done you a service, sir."

"I am convinced of it."

"The principle on which the West End Bank of Deposit is conducted, allows——"

"Yes," said Decker, interrupting him, "I have read carefully your prospectuses, pamphlets, and statements of account; and, by the way, I see that Mr. Tom Sleaford, your son, is one of your honorary advising actuaries. I should much like to make his acquaintance, and avail myself of his technical knowledge and his friendly interest."

"Certainly, by all means. I shall have great pleasure."

"I met an old friend of his, a year or two ago, out in the West, who was continually talking of him."

"Indeed, yes, to be sure; the world, after all, is not so large as it seems; we are all destined to meet again, sooner or later; I remember to have seen that discussed in a treatise on——"

"Is your son in London?"

"No—no, he is abroad," said Sleaford, trying to get back to the point at which he was interrupted but Decker had laid down his own track in which the conversation should travel.

"He is a judge of horses, I believe," continued Decker, "and has a knowledge of English country life?"

"Yes, that is true—as I was saying——"

"I want to buy an estate and a first-class stud in a hunting country," said Decker, again interrupting his visitor. "Now, if your son would take this in hand for me, or give me his advice, if he is not too proud to make it a business, I should not consider a few thousand pounds too much by way of honorarium."

"My son's pride shall not be above it, sir; thank goodness, I have been blessed with a dutiful family, and even now that my son has long since come to man's estate and can teach his father, I can still exercise a parental control over him. He shall undertake the business, most assuredly. I will telegraph to him, and he shall wait upon you at once—at once."

"If he is anywhere near Paris," suggested Kerman, "I can call upon him."

"He was in Paris yesterday, I believe, but he could meet you at Boulogne; he has a suite of rooms in the hotel there—indeed, he lives there half his time—likes the sea, does a little yachting. His mother and sister are fond of

Boulogne, and it is one of his greatest delights to entertain them and——"

"Are they there now?"

"No, not at present; they will wait until the season is well advanced; the social duties of London society are exacting, and the ladies have to see to that part of our metropolitan existence. Tom doesn't care for it; hunting, shooting, yachting, and a week or two in Paris now and then—that is Tom's idea."

"And mine, and mine," said Decker, "we shall get on capitally. I long to know your son. I will call at Boulogne on my way to Paris for that purpose."

"When do you propose to be there?"

"In a fortnight—this day fourteen days—will you give me a letter to him?"

"With the greatest pleasure. Shall I induce him to come over in the meantime?"

"No, not on any account; I would not presume to trouble him, and, in addition, my movements are very uncertain. I may be in Rome to-morrow, in Egypt next week. A man who has the misfortune to be so rich as I am, Mr. Sleaford, is a slave to his money, and never knows where he may be from day to day."

"True, true," said Sleaford, making up his mind to go over to Boulogne by the mail and arrange with Tom in a written agreement to share the profits of all transactions *re* Decker.

"But this day fortnight I will call upon your son in Boulogne, and in the meantime you might write to him about the estate and the horses, and my desire to avail myself of his technical knowledge and his friendly interest."

"Certainly, by all means. I shall have great pleasure, and if you will allow me I will give you a line to him now."

He took up a sheet of note-paper and an envelope, and wrote:—

"My Dear Son,—I have great pleasure in introducing to you T. Decker, Esq., the distinguished millionaire and traveller from the United States. To serve his interest will be to serve me. He has honored me with his confidence, and I desire to advance his wishes in every way as a banker, and, if I may venture to say so, as a friend, for he is a comparative stranger in Europe, and our duty becomes a pleas-

are in the case of a gentleman so eminent, so cultured, and so courteous.—Your most affectionate father,

"JEREMIAH SLEAFORD."

He folded the letter up, put it into an envelope, addressed it, and handed it unsealed to Decker.

"Thank you, Mr. Sleaford."

"Will you read it. Yes, yes; do."

Sleaford was anxious to impress upon Decker the character of the affectionate relationship that existed between himself and his son. Decker read the letter.

"Ah, this is indeed kind," he said.

Sleaford rose and put out his hand. Decker laid the letter in it.

"No, no, your hand, Mr. Decker; let me grip it as a friend, and in the earnest hope that this brief acquaintance may lead to a lasting and mutually profitable intimacy."

Decker allowed Sleaford to shake his hand.

"Certainly, by all means," said Decker.

"You spoke about some question of a large investment of capital?" remarked Sleaford, as if referring to a matter quite by the way, though it had been on his mind from the first.

"Yes, sir; will you consider between now and the end of the week how I can best invest, so far as profit and security go, two millions gold."

"Pounds?" asked Sleaford.

"Sovereigns," replied Decker.

"I shall do so with pleasure," said Sleaford. "In my early days I was the chairman of——"

"Will you write to me then at the end of the week?" Decker asked, interrupting Jeremiah the Loquacious at the outset of that gentleman's latest version of his wealth in the grand old days.

"Certainly; yes, most assuredly."

"I am expecting another visitor."

"Of course. I can well understand that your time is of the highest value. Yes, yes; good-morning, Mr. Decker. Good day, sir; I shall write to you."

Jeremiah the Astute took up his hat and cane, smiled benignantly, put out his hand, shook Decker's three fingers warmly, and jostled a gentleman who politely stood aside to receive Sleaford's profuse apologies.

Dr. Dampez, was then announced, and Sleaford heard

Mr. Tristram Decker say, "I am not at home any more to-day, whoever calls."

Jeremiah had come to Pall Mall East in a brougham. He now dismissed it. He preferred to walk back to his Bank. He could think as he walked; and his thoughts were many and important. A local journal had that very morning published an attack on the Bank. The writer doubted the value of the securities in which the surplus capital was said to be deposited. Within an hour of the paper appearing several ugly inquiries had been made by two of the directors, who had been content to give the scheme the benefit of their names, and had taken no part in the management of their Bank. Fourteen depositors had also given notice to withdraw their moneys. It looked as if the wind which was to scatter the financial house of cards had begun to blow, when the American millionaire loomed in sight—the good angel. Sleaford at once dubbed him the guardian of his hopes, the protector of his house, the man whose gold would meet the run on the West End Bank; for Sleaford did not doubt for a moment his capacity to convert a large contingent of Decker's sovereigns to his own uses. The ungrateful toiler, the rapacious small tradesman, the selfish working man, who had put their savings into the Bank of Deposit, should see how he would meet their claims! A bold front and a smiling face at the beginning of the run upon his scanty coffers would convert what seemed like misfortune into a stroke of luck, and he should be able to turn the malice of his enemies to account. When they saw that he could meet their claims, and that he did so with a calm smile of rebuke for their selfishness and pity for their folly, he should conquer all opposition. Then he had only to extract an apology from the local paper to establish his scheme on the surest foundations. He would go to Boulogne by the mail, and arrange with Tom in regard to the business which Mr. Decker desired to place in his hands, and return the next day to defend his citadel in Baker Street, like a besieged general who knew that his reserves were at hand. Arrived at the Bank, Mr. Sleaford found Mr. Topper Wingfield, as a country gentleman, anxious to place a small sum on deposit, with a view to extend transactions. Mr. Sleaford had no suspicion of the detective. He did not know Mr. Topper Wingfield. Even if some disagreeable memory had crossed his mind, his vanity would have dismissed it; for Jeremiah

the Discreet believed thoroughly in himself, and in the perfection of his schemes. It is quite possible that at times he even thought his plans honest. Some idea, at all events, that he had a prescriptive right to plunder the public possessed him, or he would not have been so severe on the conduct of the persons who had ventured to give notice of their withdrawal from the Bank. He had not hesitated to describe them to his head cashier as a set of wretches who were utterly unworthy of his attention.

"Fortunately," he said, "Mr. Cashier, I can meet their malice morally and financially; even if our system of requiring notice for the withdrawal of deposits did not give us time to prepare for any adverse action. I could give you ample funds to meet all claims to-day. I have a reserve that is unknown even to my family, undreamt of by my directors."

The head cashier was, no doubt, glad to hear this, because he was quietly making his arrangements to visit some distant clime at an early day, and he was only waiting until the bank had a sufficient run of luck to make it worth his while to take a long farewell of his native land.

"Going to Boulogne, my dear," said Mr. Sleaford, when Jeremiah reached home from the Bank, after having explained the principles of the institution to 'T. W.'

"And at once? Well, I'm sure I hope it will do you good."

"It is not a question of doing me good, Mrs. Sleaford; it is business, though, at the same time, I must confess it is chiefly in the interest of our son Tom, who at last is, I think, destined, through my influence, to be of mutual benefit to father and son. Where is Tim?"

"Where is he?" rejoined Tim, "at your elbow, sure; didn't I let you in, and didn't ye say, "Tim, I want ye?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Pack up my bag, Tim, I am going to Boulogne. I shall return in the morning."

"What time do ye go?"

"To-night, by the mail."

"There's plenty of time, anyway; it's only afternoon at present."

"That's true, Tim."

"Av course it's true," said Tim, making a dash at a bluebottle which was buzzing about Sleaford's head, "an' the missus will have time enough to tell you of the wonders that have occurred.

"Wonders! what wonders?"

"Oh, yes, I am sure I had almost forgotten," said Mrs. Sleaford; "You put me in such a flurry about Boulogne."

"Misther Kerman, sorr, he's returned with riches galore, matrimony in his eye, and the Bank of England in his pocket; bedad and I always liked the fellow, though ye did call him a clodhopper when he'd made sacrifices worthy of St. Patrick himself."

"What is all this?" asked Sleaford, looking first at Tim and then at his wife.

"Be jabers an' it's wonderful! Miss Patty will be afther telling ye all about it herself. She's only just come in, and the telegram that's gone off to Misther Roper is a regular despatch, that it is, and more power to her!"

"Tim, go away," said Mrs. Sleaford. "I declare you seem entirely to forget yourself."

"Ah, be jabers, I've done that same this many a year, with thinking too much about other people," said Tim, leaving the room.

Then Mrs. Sleaford, folding her withered arms demurely over a black silk bodice, proceeded to give her wondering husband a rambling account of Patty's interview with Miss Crosby, which caused Jeremiah to curse in emphatic language the brazen woman who had stood between Tom and all their best hopes on a certain first Sunday after Christmas, and to hope that she might meet with sundry and numerous calamities. Mrs. Sleaford met these reflections with mild protests of her own against Tom's ingratitude, and in the tearful expressions of her belief that if he had married Miss Crosby he would have done something for the solicitous authoress of his being. But she also hoped that the minx who had led him astray would meet with her due reward, and Mr. Brayford too, under whose pauper protection Jeremiah understood the disgraceful young person was living.

"And so we are to have Roper as a son-in-law after all. Well, well, it is our duty to consult the happiness of our children before all other considerations. I have long since given my consent, reluctantly, I must confess; but I have given up mere sentiments of family pride, and Roper is, after all, not ungentlemanlike in his manners. He shall come into the Bank. I will show Patty that I can be magnanimous as well as affectionate."

"Thank you pa," said Patty, entering the room; "But

I will not allow Mr. Roper to be indebted to my family for worldly advancement."

"How do you mean, my love?"

"He shall not be a banker."

"My pet!"

"I don't like banks."

"Why, my love?"

"They break."

"Break, Patty?"

"Yes."

"But they are national institutions. Bankers rule the world."

"They will not rule me."

"Patty, my dear, you must not get silly notions into your head."

"I can't help it."

"Why, dear?"

"Because I can't always agree with you, papa; and I am always silly when I don't."

"But we must not be silly, my love; and we must not get absurd notions into our little heads about banks," said Sleaford, kissing his daughter on the forehead.

"Then don't let us talk about such things," said Patty, walking slowly to a corner of the room to pick up a box of water-colors and commence preparations for finishing her latest study of a sunset in the Himalaya Mountains from a chromo-lithograph. "When I get my ten thousand pounds out of the Funds, or wherever it is, I shall keep it in several stockings until it is all spent."

Miss Sleaford patted some pinky-white clouds with a long brush as she uttered this latter financial absurdity, and looked up at her father with her calm eyes. Jeremiah, as he returned her look, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders, saw Patty's dowry slipping still further out of his grasp. "Happily," he thought to himself, "I can do without it; my intimate friend, Mr. Tristram Decker, has placed his vast wealth at my disposal; by the end of the week the new Pactolus will begin to flow in golden torrents in whatever course I shall direct. Baker Street and Fitzroy Square will be the principal receivers of the golden flood."

"What are you thinking of, my dear?" asked Mrs. Sleaford.

"That it is a great blessing," replied Sleaford, looking

reproachfully at Patty and her sunset, "we are not dependent on our children, or we might be left to tear our gray hairs in the streets, and call upon the winds to blow and crack their cheeks, like the venerable Lear."

Mrs. Sleaford shook her head, took out a lace handkerchief, and tried to force back the tears that would not be checked.

"Mamma," said Patty, laying down her brushes, "don't be absurd; pa knows he is talking nonsense."

Jeremiah raised his eyes solemnly to the ceiling and left the room, and ten minutes afterwards Patty and her mother had drifted into a mild conversation about the most becoming wedding-dress for a girl of Patty's delicate complexion.

And in the meantime Dr. Dampez was giving Tristram Decker a lesson in the mysterious and awful science of toxicology.

CHAPTER IV.

DR. DAMPEZ DISCOURSES ON POISONS.

SMALL, deeply-set eyes, that seemed to focus an object as if they were lenses in a telescope, and could be projected forward and withdrawn within their depths, which were shadowy and dark, a sensual mouth, partially concealed by a black moustache, a heavy jaw, a broad, flat nose, a somewhat retreating forehead, and black, silky hair; Dr. Dampez was a remarkable looking man. Dressed in black cloth, he wore a white cravat and a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses. When he was amused or excited he had a habit of showing a set of white, regular teeth that might have been as false as the color of his black moustache, for his ill shaven cheeks and chin were stubbly with white hairs. Of medium height, he was broad shouldered and stoutly built. His complexion was sallow; he took snuff continually; he had large, fleshy, seared hands, and one leg was shorter than the other, so that he limped.

He was in singular contrast to the spare, blue-eyed, delicate, nervous-looking man who sat opposite to him, eagerly

drinking in the doctor's words, and occasionally making a note on a sheet of paper.

"Yes; it was a very remarkable case," said Decker, "and I am indebted to you for your learned and lucid description of it."

"A friend of mine say, 'You must leaf London.' 'What for?' I ask. 'If your reputation is bad, lif in London; if good, why then still lif in London. If you wish to hide yourself, lif in London. Do you desire to be pooblique, lif in London. No; I stay. I like the great city of cities; it agree with me best after I haf seen every other city of the world.'"

The doctor spoke with a strong foreign accent, and with some slight action of the shoulders and the right hand. His voice was not unpleasant; but the peculiar motion of the eyes was that of a man of intense secretive power. He took snuff not only as if it gave him some physical enjoyment, but as though it assisted his memory, and afforded him useful pauses for reflection and observation. Some men obtain this latter aid by the use of an eyeglass: Dr. Dampez did not use his glasses at all during his interview with Decker.

"You have travelled much?"

"All over the world. I know the flora, the minerals, the manufactures of every country, and I am acquaint with the mineral poisons of every land, east, west, north, and south."

"Are you a Frenchman, monsieur? Pardon my inquisitiveness; I am anxious that we should know each other thoroughly."

"Monsieur does me honor. I am a cosmopolitan; my father was French, my mother was a Servian; I was born in Cairo."

He smiled, and offered his snuff-box to Decker, who declined it politely.

"I prefer tobacco through the medium of a cigar. May I offer you a Cabana?"

"No, thank you."

Decker lighted a cigar.

"And you have devoted most of your life to the study of toxicology?"

"All my life—all, monsieur."

"Just now I was thinking it might be possible to learn from you all you know."

"It might be in a long time," said the doctor, smiling, as if to hide the thought which was evidently in his mind.

"I want to be your pupil. Don't think me rude. I gathered, from what you said a while ago, that you are poor?"

"It is a verity," said the doctor, "as poor as Monsieur Job. I had a patroness. The lawyer almost ruin her in making for her the defence necessaire in the affair I tell you about. She leaf London for economies on the Continent; I remain."

"You would like to be rich?"

"To have moneys is to live," replied Dampez, looking out of his depths upon Decker, and taking a pinch of snuff with more than usual care, weighing it thoughtfully before consuming it.

"You acknowledge the power of gold?"

"He who denies it is a fool."

Decker chewed the end of his cigar in the corner of his mouth, and rising from his seat to get a better view of the doctor's face leaned against the mantelshelf.

"Will you let me make you rich?"

"Will I!" exclaimed the doctor, shrugging his shoulders

"You shall give me your secret, and I will pay for the knowledge. I will be your pupil."

Dampez moved his position, getting his back to the light.

"Gold for knowledge. Much knowledge, much money," said Decker; "is that fair?"

"Certainly, monsieur, it is."

"Did Mr. Topper Wingfield tell you I am a millionaire?"

"No, monsieur, no. But you are American."

"Therefore rich, eh?"

"Americans who travel much have money; that is my experience."

"I have a gold mine, Mr. Dampez."

"Mon Dieu! the philosopher's stone. Monsieur, I throw myself to your feet."

The Frenchman rose, smiled with his white teeth, not with his sallow face, and in sitting down again managed to place himself between Decker and the light.

"Then is it agreed that I become your pupil?"

"The treaty is complete."

"Shall I pay you a retaining fee at once?"

"Monsieur l'American is the soul of honor."

"Will you fix the amount?"

"I leaf it with you; we are agreed about the value of knowledge and the power of money."

Decker sat down and wrote a cheque for three hundred pounds.

"Will that retain your exclusive services for one week?"

"Three ondred pounds," said the doctor, his eyes coming out of their depths to gloat over the draft, "payable at Nathan's! Monsieur is liberal."

"At the end of the week I will double it."

"Monsieur is charming."

"You are a cosmopolitan, you say, Dr. Dampez; but I suppose you have sworn allegiance to some government?"

"No, monsieur. I have sworn allegiance to Science; I ow nothing to man. Nature is my monarch."

"Forgive me for asking the question."

"Monsieur is speaking to his servant," said Dampez; "let monsieur command."

"May I?"

"Certainement."

But the small eyes seemed to hide themselves and watch. Decker tried to penetrate the optical depths.

"You gif me moneys; in return you af the service of my brain."

The doctor brushed away the snuff which had fallen upon his cravat, and Decker, on the point of coming straight to the business which was in his mind, paused for the second time, partly in doubt of himself, partly in doubt of the instrument to be used. It had occurred to him, after reading the Longville poisoning case, and giving rein to his morbid fancy, that if there were a subtle drug which would play the part of a familiar spirit to his bitter intentions against Tom Sleaford, he could encompass his revenge in such a way that no scandal should attach to the name of Caroline Denton. To shoot Sleaford would be to invite the whole world to an inquest upon Caroline's unhappy history. He had resolved to kill him under any circumstances. He would never quit this world and leave Tom Sleaford behind. There were other considerations which influenced him beyond the mere desire for vengeance: other intentions besides that profanely expressed one of doing the work of heaven. But at present the design of the fatal business was incomplete in conception and plan. It was destined

that both should be in some measure directed by the knowledge to be imparted by Dr. Dampez.

"I have never studied toxicology," said Decker: "all I know about it I gleaned from the famous chapter in 'Monte Christo.'"

"*Ma foi*, then it is vera leetle," said the doctor, showing his teeth. "Mithridates, the Medicis, Flamel, Fontana, the 'Arabian Nights,' L'Abbé Adelmonte, Madame Villefort, all *amusant* and romantic. But science, monsieur, is science, and fiction is a different thing altogether. *Aqua della Tofana!—tres bien;* well, what was it? Only a leetle arsenic crystal dissolve in waterre. It puzzle *les savants* in the ages of the dark, but we detect him in the body to-day as easy as snuff. The cabbage-garden of 'Monte Christo' was pretty—*tres joli;* it is the poetry of toxicology—vera good for the children, not for us, monsieur, not for us."

"Don't you think, then, that they manage these things in Eastern climes with the power accredited to them by Dumas?"

"No, not at all; we laugh at their knowledge in London. Would you lif with the secrets of the world around you? —London, London! The Orientals wise men in toxicology! They poison like the butchers; it is because there were no students *des poisons* of sufficient attainment to discover the deadly mineral that can nevaire hide him from the test of the grand science. Monsieur, this talk of the secrets possess by Italy, by the Turk, by the Indian, it is imposition."

"Is that so?" asked Decker, doubtingly. "And yet——"

"You would refer to history?" said the doctor, as if reading Decker's thoughts. "Well, it gif you accounts of that same *aqua Tofana* as a mysterious invention of an Italian womans of the fifteenth century, which was to destroy life in a year or in a few hours. During the Pontificate of Alexander VII. many husbands die, and there was a society of young married womans which deal with the poison under directions of an old hag of Sicily. You see how beautiful in this is the veil of religion; Madame Spara, the crafty old womans, she make up her phials of *aqua della Tofana* with this inscription: 'Manna of St. Nicholas!' Ah, Monsieur Decker, if you would play cards with the devil get under the wing of a saint."

"You are a philosopher as well as a toxicologist," said Decker.

"They go together," replied the doctor. "Madame Spara kill six hundred people with the 'Manna of St. Nicholas.' To-day let her lif in Europe; she kill one we find her out, with her vulgar arsenic and her cheap religion; though we make much of the saints yet, and we murder thousands in open day with sword and gun, and Europe smile, only that we do it under a flag with a cross upon it, and for the loaf of God."

"I like you, Dr. Dampez," said Decker. "I am in luck to find so excellent a professor."

"The romance of poisons," said the doctor, smiling with his teeth, "is full of tragic episodes, all with one lesson against the unlearned tampering with a science which has no royal road to its mystery, monsieur. Marguerite d'Aubray, Marchioness de Brinvilliers, her game is a reproach to humanity, but it is also more, another of many examples that womans always end bad with toxicology. A Gascon loof madame, and is put into prison by his family. There he study poison. She come to him; he gif her the leetle pill or what not; she kill her family; the Gascon make his leetle dose in a mask, the fumes of the compound are fatal to life; one day his mask fall—he die. Madame is so much desire to have his secret, she say too much; her crime was discover; she give up the ghost in fire—they burnt her alife. You shudder, monsieur."

"A horrible death for a woman!" said Decker.

"I do not know—perhaps it is; some womans who haf the faith in the saints embrace the fire and say they like it; but that is in the past, not to-day, when martyrdom is out of the *mode*."

"Gone, with truth, and honor, and virtue," said Decker.

"You haf been disappointed, monsieur."

Decker shrugged his shoulders.

"Disappointment comes of expecting too much."

"I hope you and I will avoid that in the business which brings us together."

Dr. Dampez took snuff, and brushed the dust of it from his sleeve.

"The ancients," said Decker, bringing the doctor back to his subject, "had poisoned rings; the Greeks had fatal wreaths for virgin brows; the Indians have poisoned arrows to this day."

"True; but we are talking of a method that will defy discovery, are we not? We wipe out the charlatan of the past; we snuff out the quackery of witch and magician; we stand in the broad light of science."

"It is plain that in this matter of toxicology I am an infant, groping in the dark, nervous, until I grow accustomed to the absence of the daylight, but I shall have all the courage man can have when I feel my feet and stretch out my hand, and know what I am clutching."

"Let monsieur be frank with his professor. If monsieur would study toxicology from a medico-legal basis, I shall tell him in the language of the manual that 'la douleur, les angoisses, les convulsions, en forment le triste cortége; la mort en est souvent le terme, quelquefois elle frappe sur le champ sa victime,' which monsieur will translate—'pains, agonies, convulsions, form the sad procession; death is often the end: sometimes suddenly she strikes her victim.' And with such dolorous introduction I shall teach him what a poison is, its effects, its antidotes, and I shall refer my pupil for historic instances to *les causes celebres* of "Le Manuel des Poisons." But, if monsieur has other purposes, we waste time."

Decker bowed, intimating his desire not to interrupt the doctor.

"You wish that I should discourse?"

"Go on, doctor."

"I fear to appear too egotistic, but I know of what I speak, and I lay on the side tradition, romance, the tragedy on the stage, with its phials and its rings, its fumes of the witches, and I deal with this grand science alone, the wonders of nature and the wonders of the mind of man, which conquer nature. Let us dismiss the quacks of the fiction and the stage, and come to the plain truths. When I was a student first I haf for my professor a *savant*, who was in the schools *chez* Chaussier; he had witness *aux experiences de* Messieurs Alibert Dupuytren, Magendie, Orfila; he was acquaint with the interesting observations of Portal, and as his pupil I began my life with the fruits of half a century of inquiry, experiment, success. But to-day, monsieur, in London there is Englishmen who haf find out the very heart of nature, who laf at your wise men of the East—Messieurs Taylor, Guy, Sare John Harley, Sare Brodie, Messieurs Blake and Bernard. Monte Christo! Why we gif to small leetle boy in Paris or London,

un eleve of the school in our laboratory, our surgery, our chemistry—we gif to him to manage a case of de Monte Christo, and he find it out altogether."

Dr. Dampez shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and his eyes no longer hid themselves. They sparkled in their depths.

"With our experience, our microscope, our analysis, our experiment physiological, our leetle frog, our Anglish patience, our treatise, our simple test, our complex test—with these we pull the nose of Abbe Adelmonte; we make of him stuff and nonsence, as the English say—stuff and nonsence."

Dr. Dampez rose from his seat and limped across the room, his hands behind his back, his head thrust forward. Coming back to his seat, he showed his teeth, and held out his snuff-box to Decker.

"What is there wonderful if I gif you one pinch zat leetle snuff enough to make you shut your eye to open no more? Nothing at all. But, if I gif it you and it leave no trace—if Monsieur Taylor, Doctor Guy, Sare John Harley, they come to the body and find no trace of my little pinch, ah, then is the wonder!"

Decker paused in the action of taking a pinch between his thumb and finger. The doctor contemplated him with his small, piercing eyes, his white teeth, and his sallow, devilish face; Decker shuddered.

"Ah" said the doctor, closing his snuff-box, "you would not have the courage to administer the leetle pinch, or the leetle drop, to a friend who might require to make quick his visit to heaven!"

"You are a keen observer, Dr. Dampez?"

"I have seen much peoples? I have looked into the minds of many men."

"I am rather nervous to-day; I am ill, as you see."

"It is not necessaire to feel your pulse to know that.

"You are a little nervous now, and weary. Don't you think we waste the time?"

"Pardon me, doctor; and don't be impatient. Let us drink."

Tht doctor smiled. Decker rang twice, which was the signal for Davings.

"Two drinks," he said, when Davings appeared, "as usual."

Davings retired to his anteroom, and quickly re-ap-

peared with two wine-glasses full of an attractive-looking iquor.

"We call it in America a cocktail," said Decker, as Davings left the room.

"I know him, he is good," said the doctor, following Decker's example, and drinking the compound.

"Would that be a good medium for a fatal dose that leaves no trace?"

Decker looked at the doctor; straight into the cavernous depths of his suspicious and strange eyes.

"A fine drink—*un vin magnifique;* it would be a charming death to die."

"I do not care for a death too pleasant," said Decker.

"It is not for yourself?"

"No."

"Ah, I see!"

"I do not need such aid; my end is fixed hard enough."

The doctor weighed out a pinch of snuff and took it with great deliberation.

"It seemed to me as you read your evidence, and also from your comments as you proceeded, that you do not think it difficult to paralyze the body, control the action of the tongue, freezing the very speech as if at the moment of articulation, and that the brain may still be active, the mind at work, almost to the point of death."

"You are recovering."

"In what way?"

"Your courage is returning to you. Order for us, monsieur, one more quantity of that sublime wine of the cocktail, and we shall get on."

Davings was summoned; the dose was repeated.

"Well," said the doctor, "you have described something like what I can do; what they suspect was done in the Longville case, and which English *savants* have not yet discover; it is the one principal secret they haf not prove; it is a secret known to me. But it cannot last; they find out all things in London, as in Paris. But, my dear pupil, you miss out the great wonder, which is—no detection. Now let us consider the family of the leetle pill you want, and then you can take your choice for the experiment in your leetle rabbit or your leetle friend. Now look you, there is the narcotic which give stupor; your belladonna, hyosciamus niger, which make for you delirium; your harmless aconite, tobacco; digitalis and the Calabar bean,

which procure for you paralysis or loss of muscular power —an effect I have studied much. Then there is strichnia, which your Monsieur Palmer use well at first, and then careless; it get you the tetanic spasms a horrible and a vulgar death. There is arsenic, with its inflammatory effects; mercury and cantharides, well known, and only fit for rats—they should nevaire be used for a human being. Antimony make for the lungs; manganese and copper kill through the liver; chromate of potash attack the conjunctiva, iodine the lymphatic glands; phosphorus is insidious, and brings on that fatty degeneration which might be ascribe to natural causes but for the luminosity of the body after death; spurred rye is not so well known; and lead make for the muscles an enemy destructive. But all these show themselves in their action, and when it is all ovaire we find their remains; they leaf behind their handwriting, which science can read."

Dr. Dampez took a pinch of snuff, and smiled with his lips.

"It is the effect I am thinking of, more than the discovery of the means," said Decker.

"You would like your leetle rabbit or your pet dog to linger, to make a quiet and interesting *coupe?* You must then describe to your professor the effect as you wish it to be; we shall then considaire."

He looked at Decker and held out his box.

"It is easy enough, toxicology in a rough way, and you make the end almost with what you like,—the innocent salts of Epsom, the Godfrey's cordial; but the grand study of the science, where it deal with the delicate anatomy, the brain, the blood, and the wonderful organization, if it be the leetle rabbit or the human kind, it is for the *savant*, the student, the travellaire ovaire many lands, who know the flower and the herb and the mineral of all countries as an open book, who say to the *Helleborus fœtidus*, 'Oh, how is your amiable sister, *Helleborus orientalis?*' who know the dispositions of each member of the grand family; who can say to the *Cicuta virosa*, 'Ah, you have a classic history which dates back to Athens, and you are more famous and more deadly than your relative, *Philandrium equaticum.*' It is the grand science of the philosophers who look deep into the well of the knowledge, who know every variation of *le champignon*—the simple and the poison, the minerals in their multifarious forms, the alkalies, the car-

bonates, the acids, the salts of the alkalies, and the earth, metallic irritants, their powers individual, their effects combined, arsenic, antimony, mercury, zinc, silver, bismuth. Ah, Monsieur Decker, you enter a wide, wide field, when you commence your research into the wonders of toxicology!"

"And you, Monsieur le Docteur," said Decker, unintentionally falling into the grandiloquent style of the tutor, "you, sir, begin to live when the pupil at your feet can load you with riches. Listen, my friend, I am a man of business. You can see in my face that I have not many years to live, and you will the better understand that I have no time to waste. To do justice to your scientific tuition I should want a quarter of a century added to my future years. Since that cannot be, I must have the benefit of your researches. Ten thousand pounds—fifty thousand—are of no moment to me; but I want that compound you referred to in your evidence, I want your skill, I want to command your assistance. Do I make myself understood now?"

"Quite, monsieur; I haf been waiting for you to make up your mind to gif me your full confidence. Command me, as if we were in that East you speak of—you the grand monarch, I the minister, who only knows your will. But——"

Dr. Dampez paused.

"Yes, well?"

"We must not meet again here. It was not wise I came, nor perhaps to speak to that Mr. Tee Doubleyou, as he calls himself. But he is your servant. I shall gif you what you require. I shall do for you all you wish. You come to my room; I gif you the address in Soho. Come with a difference; say a leetle beard like this, perhaps."

He drew from his breast-pocket a package. It contained a false beard which the doctor fastened upon his own chin.

"Anything that will disguise a leetle. Well, you come; I gif you back this draft; you bring me the money, and do not wait for the end of the week. I will take all you gif in one sum, at one time, in notes and gold, and gif you entire satisfaction."

"You are a business man, doctor."

"There are now two business mans."

"When shall I come?"

"At once; I am ready."

"To-morrow night, at ten."

"Bien! you will find me Nombre 20, Rue James. I shall be waiting at ten to open the door; I haf no servant—I only trust myself and my patients."

BOOK IX.

CHAPER I.

PUPPETS WORKED WITH GOLDEN WIRES.

During the week of his friend's visit to Paris, Tristram Decker sat in his chambers pulling the wires of his various puppets, and making them dance to his entire satisfaction.

The Californian mine-owner had not reckoned without his host. He had not altogether over-estimated the value of money. No city in the world acknowledges its potency more promptly than London. It is true there are some few things money cannot purchase, even in this metropolis. Decker, however, believed that everything he required, except health and a reversal of past inevitable events, could be bought.

Monsieur Favart came and took up his quarters at Pall Mall East over the rooms occupied by Decker; but only for twenty-four hours.

Within three days of receiving his original instructions, he had brought Decker the full particulars of William Graham Denton's death and burial, which did not differ in any notable detail from the sufficient though brief account already in the possession of the reader. More than this, he had placed in his employer's hands a certified copy of the registration of the marriage of Caroline Virginia Denton to Philip Gardner, at Birmingham, bearing out Brayford's theory of the registration having taken place at some large city within easy access of Essam. Sparcoe, being consulted on this, confirmed the opinion of Maclosky Jones, expressed

on that memorable day when Caroline left The Cottage, that a false name would not vitiate the marriage, identification being established. Dorothy Migswood had gone to live with an old sweetheart, who was employed in the London Docks.

The confirmation of Caroline's marriage, even though Tom Sleaford had disguised it under a false name, for a little time shook Decker's plans, and left him in a condition of uncertainty as to what might be the best course to pursue, not simply in regard to his own feelings, but for the honor and dignity of the woman to whom ho was ready to sacrifice his life in the present and his hopes of heaven if he had any, in the future. It occurred to him, like a flash of light passing over his gloomy thoughts, that if there were anything of the angel left in Tom Sleaford's nature, perhaps it might be possible to re-unite the man and woman whom God or the law had joined, establishing the credit and reputation of old Denton's daughter, and giving to her son an honorable heritage and a name.

This gleam of light was immediately followed by the dark shadow of Caroline's narrative; for she had told Decker all her story of misery and woe; she had kneeled at his feet, and at the same time had confessed her love for him, and her hope, when she left New York, that he would follow her and wait until time had softened the heart of her father, and new scenes had pushed back in his memory the recollection of his wrongs. Then it was that Decker felt how helpless gold is when the noblest and best aspirations of the heart are concerned; and he wished the Sacramento and its treasures could have been wiped out, so that he had been left free to follow his love through the world. But while he dwelt fondly on this thought, the patter of little Willie's feet sounded in his heart an alarm of hatred, and awoke within his nature all that was cruel and revengeful. He was tossed on a sea of passion and remorse, with the feeling that there was only one port to steer for, and that it lay open for his entrance. The harbor was full of foul shapes. His welcome there would be heralded in the demoniacal laughter of unholy spirits, and he would pay the pilot with that piece of ore which had blood upon it. Those days at the Gulch came back to him. "There's blood upon it." He remembered the remark, and it seemed as if the piece of red-looking quartz grew before him, a rock stained with bloody footsteps.

Decker's constitution required additional stimulant every day. He built himself up with tonics. He kept body and soul together by artificial means. It was like working high-pressure engines beyond their highest power. He knew it, and he was continually preparing for the inevitable result.

"I intended originally," he said to Monsieur Favart, on the fifth day of his agent's return, "to request your services in Boulogne or Paris, to unearth the husband of a deserted lady, but during your absence he has been delivered into my hands. It is curious how the smallest things, the most trifling incidents, may change one's plans. Mr. Topper Wingfield mentioned in the course of conversation an apparently trifling circumstance in his experiences of criminal life. It started me on a new track; it led me into a fresh field of inquiry; it changed my entire plans; though neither he in mentioning it, nor myself in listening, had the remotest thought or idea that it could affect anything we were discussing, or anybody with whom we were dealing. The mere accidental mention of a circumstance entirely outside our relationship will turn out to be the most important influence in all my plans."

"Do you believe anything is accidental, monsieur?" asked Favart, lighting a cigar which Decker had pressed upon him.

"I will answer you with a question. Are you a fatalist?"

"I am."

"It is a convenient belief; but it leaves no room for independent action—it makes puppets of us."

"What else are we? It is only for us to take the world as we find it."

"Are we not responsible to a higher power?"

"On the contrary, it seems to me we have claims and grievances against the so-called Divine authority for using us ill."

"Are love, revenge, friendship, hatred, mere acts of volition? Have we no control over them? Do they come unbidden? Are they exercised by some hidden and unsuspected decree?"

"Monsieur interprets my own views."

"I am then a mere instrument in the hands of Fate?"

"Certainly."

"What are my brains for, then, Monsieur Favart—my

feelings, my sentiments? I do not quite go with you. It seems to me that the soul of a man is like the engines of a steamer, they propel the craft—the captain is the directing brain."

"And the tides and currents and the ocean, may they not still represent Fate? I once waited at Melbourne for a grand capture. He came over in a sailing vessel. Fate was against me. That ship went to the bottom."

"And is Fate such a bungler that an entire ship's crew and passengers must go down because the death of one man was requisite? Why, that is as bad as the people who, to remove some grass that was growing at the base of a church steeple, pulled down the steeple itself. No, no, Monsieur Favart, you may think like that in Europe, but we Americans know that each man controls his own destiny. If a Western rowdy thought Fate had ordained he should shoot the man who had insulted him, and whom he meant to pepper, he wouldn't do it; he wouldn't consent to be a mere tool in the hands of Fate—not he. Nor will I, Monsieur Favart—nor will I."

"Monsieur Decker is argumentative. I accept defeat with the good grace, though your poet says a man convinced against his will he is of the same opinion still."

"Fate had evidently ordained that several and sundry persons in this metropolis should have what we should call in the States a high old time of devilry; you and our allies, monsieur, will put on the break and pull them up. Listen a moment. This is business. There is in this city a house of infamy called 'The Retreat,' where a certain Major Wenn and Miss Isabella Weaver have been playing the part of Cruel Fate to young women and Good Fortune to themselves. They have committed one of the vilest of a great city's crimes, that of diverting the golden stream of charity from the starving poor into their own coffers. Mr. Topper Wingfield, an experienced detective, tells me that there is an army of Wenns and Weavers in London, who collect not less than a million and a half to two millions a year, ostensibly for the poor, and by a system of ingenious duplicity continue to live upon it themselves idle, debauched lives, and to die in the odor of sanctity. Is that one of your ordinations of Fate? No, sir; Fate or Heaven, who or whatever it may be, is asleep. If I had twenty years before me, I would amuse myself by tweaking Fate's nose, and morally—physically if I might—hanging all the Wenns

and Weavers to the London lamp-posts. But I am wandering away from the subject in hand. Forgive me. Through the aid of one of my agents, Major Wenn has been arrested. He is locked up, and can find no bail. A committee of the most liberal subscribers to 'The Retreat' is in possession of that establishment. But Miss Weaver has escaped. Every inquiry has failed to trace her. The lady of charity had evidently been expecting an invitation to defend herself on a charge of fraud. She did not wait for Fate to execute the warrant for her arrest. She preferred to collect together a couple of thousand pounds and some jewelry, and go away. Now, Mr. Wingfield has a very intelligent ally in a long inquiring proboscis; but he and T. W. are at fault. I have a presentiment that they will continue so. I think it a pity that Fate should deprive Major Wenn of companionship in the dock, and I want you to assist Fate in regard to Weaver, instead of looking up Mr. Philip Gardner. I feel sure Mademoiselle Weaver will not elude you."

Decker leaned his head against the half-open window, which was filled with flowers. He coughed painfully. When the paroxysm was over, he lighted another cigar, and sat down, intimating by his gestures that Monsieur Favart should pay no attention to the trifling physical interruption, which only reminded him that there was not too much time to waste in regard to their mutual arrangements.

"Here is the lady's photograph," said Decker; "she is a fine woman."

"Very," said Favart, regarding the photograph intently. "It is a face easy to recognize."

"Have you seen it before?"

"I do not think it. Who holds the warrant for her arrest?"

"Mr. Wingfield, of Scotland Yard."

"Good. I may act in this matter altogether untrammelled by other persons or other inquiries?"

"Quite."

"From what you say I judge she has left England."

"I should think so."

"Anticipating the storm, she has possibly been making ready for her departure for some time?"

"No doubt."

"I may be away from London a few weeks before you hear from me."

"So long?"

"Monsieur is impatient for her capture."

"Very impatient. She is a fiend in petticoats."

"That is not a rarity."

"Indeed. I know nothing about women."

"Monsieur has been saved a world of trouble."

"Ah, Monsieur Favart, how little we know of each other in this world! All the people I have met in this metropolis envy me for my wealth, even though they cannot fail to see death in my face. And I would give all I possess to wipe out the time when I was making that fortune. I should have been occupied in a very different way, and probably have been living in a garret, but I should have been happy. But, there, I will not trouble you with my affairs. I only wanted to say that it is a mistake for any man to envy another, or to think that he can altogether judge his acquaintance by his own experience."

"You are not happy, Monsieur Decker. Perhaps it is that you view life too seriously."

"Are you happy?"

"Oh yes."

"What makes you happy?"

"Money and success."

"Have I made you happy?"

"Very much."

"It is gratifying to know that."

"You despise me at first. You think me a mere spy."

"Oh no. I beg your pardon, Monsieur Favart, if I hurt your feelings."

"Ah, well, that is all over. A man dignifies his profession by his mode. I am never cruel. I give the hare, when I hunt him, a fair chance. When it is merely a diplomatic secret I have to find, I slay him like a game at chess. When I find that Registry yesterday, I thrill with delight, though the game was easy."

"Life is a puzzle."

"But death, monsieur, that is the great enigma."

"Do you think so?"

"I do not like the day when I shall be called upon to solve it."

"It is only a long rest, Favart; don't be afraid, you go to sleep, and sleep longer than usual, that's all. I shall lie down contentedly soon. And that reminds me, my friend, if you find it necessary in your absence to draw upon me,

do so. Don't give Weaver an advantage in the chase to save expense. If I don't see you within the next seven days, report to me twice or thrice every day of your progress, your hopes, and——"

"My success, monsieur," said Favart. "I shall find Mademoiselle Weaver."

"Buncher, sir—I'm Buncher," in a husky voice said a slouching man, who had entered the room as Mr. Decker and Monsieur Favart parted.

"Oh yes, of course. Take a seat, Buncher."

"I found 'er, sir," he said, jerking his right shoulder forward.

"Good for you, Mr. Buncher."

"Lor', ain't she a stunner, too? A regular out-and-outer!"

"Yes?"

"Come to town, sir, with five 'undred quid, as she says' er missus giv' 'er. Comes up, sir, to a old pal as worked at the Docks; and they ups and takes a small public-'ouse near Dock 'Ed, sir; and in less nor six months turns 'er out into the street, 'e does, an' knocks 'er teeth out, sir, an' is nigh havin' to answer for 'er death. She 'as 'im up and gives 'im three months. An' there was a party as had a bill of sale in the 'ouse, an' they sells it up, bag and baggage. Ill got, ill spent, sir. It's a old proverb, but it's true."

"Ah," said Decker, "the little sinners get punished; the great ones get off."

"I dunno, sir. You knows best."

"And where is she now?"

"Well, sir, when she got served out so she signified, it seems, that she knowed Bill Smith, of the Old Kent Road—Cockney Bill, as they calls him—and so they took her there in a cab, some of her friends; but Bill, he said, well he'd know'd her once down at a place as he took possession of, but she was a houdacious lot, and he wasn't goin' to be troubled with her, though he didn't mind standing a crown for her; and so they took her to the workus, and there I see her yesterday; and to-morrow she's to be charged with tearing up her clothes and assaulting the matron, and she'll get three months."

"An interesting and excellent report, Mr. Buncher. The devil does not always take care of his own."

"No, sir, I suppose proverbs ain't to be relied on reg'lar."

"Here is your money, Buncher; it has been well earned."

Buncher took the notes with a "Thank ye sir."

"Call for me in the morning and take me to the Police Court where this woman is to be charged. I would like to see her in the dock, as you call it."

"Yes, sir, certainly. Anything else, sir?"

"Not at present, thank you."

"Wish yer good-day, sir."

"Good-day."

* * * * * * *

"And what of this Robinson, Mr. Wingfield?" asked Decker, addressing his next visitor. "What does T. W. say to him?"

"T. W. is quite satisfied," said Wingfield, patting his nose. "But this business is no ordinary matter, and if its stirred up it will bring in other people—one gentleman that's a friend of yours."

"Indeed? Who is my friend?"

"Mr. Tom Sleaford."

"What! My friend!" exclaimed Decker, losing all control over himself, and grasping a chair for support.

"I'm sorry I've made you feel ill sir," said Wingfield. "I mean that he used to be a friend of Mr. Kerman—the Squire, as he was called—and he's a friend of yours, I think?"

"Yes, yes! Well?"

"Yo see, sir, when T. W. gets poking about and inquiring into things, yo should'nt blame him if the whole thing comes out?"

"No. Go on."

"Well, yo must know Mr. Robinson, Mr. Sleaford and some others were mixed up with transactions that have been squared."

"Who are others?"

"Not Squire Kerman, and not Mr. Harry Brayford, you may be sure; they were the dupes."

"You seem to have studied this thing all round," said Decker, now recovering his self-possession.

"T. W.'s a devil when he's once got on the scent of things," Wingfield replied.

"You have not been talking about me?"

"No."

"Yet you seem to understand that I like Kerman and Brayford."

"Oh, yes."

"How did you know that I knew Kerman?"

"Oh, easy enough; learnt that in the City."

"How?"

"Yo won't use what I tell yo?"

"No."

"I have an old Lancashire friend at Nathan's."

"You don't think it necessary to pry into my affairs when you are inquiring into those of Robinson?"

"Not at all, sir; but in my business we get into the habit, yo see, of putting this and that together."

"And you keep your secret—T. W. and yourself, eh? There are only you two in the partnership? Is that so?"

"T. W. and me is one, and what we know we know," said Wingfield. "If yore confidence in me is shaken because I've got to know too much, sack me."

Mr. Wingfield drew himself up with a defiant look at Decker.

"You startled me a little, that's all."

"I'm Lancashire," said Wingfield, "though I've been in London a good many years; and when a Lancashire man takes a business in hand and means it, he does mean it, and you've gotten to trust him or chuck him up; that's what I've gotten to say to yo, Mr. Decker."

"Yes, yes," said Decker impatiently. "Don't let us have any spreadeagleism—I understand."

"That's ole right, if yo understand. No offence, sir, but the confidence mnst not be ole on one side."

"Very well; now, what is your advice, Mr. Lancashire?"

"Wingfield, sir, Wingfield."

"What does T. W. advise?"

"Mr Brayford can prosecute," said Wingfield, "and he is willing to do so."

"You have seen him, then?

"I have. Was that wrong?"

"No. Pray don't be so ill-tempered, Wingfield. Have a drink?"

"Not now. Beg pardon, I was a bit ruffled."

"Well, you saw Brayford, and——"

"I took him to Lawrence & Lawrence, the famous company lawyers."

"Yes?"

"They said there was a good case, but it would cost a lot of money to fight."

"And you told them——"

"That there was any amount ready for purpose, and that the case was to be worked on public grounds; and I said that Mr. Brayford had friends who meant to support him in ridding the public of a fashionable city swindler."

"Very good, Mr. Wingfield."

"And to-morrow, sir, you will just put Mr. Brayford into financial position strong enough to retain Lawrence & Lawrence, and we shall get a warrant to arrest Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson."

"Mr. Wingfield, you are a smart man."

"Lawrence & Lawrence think Mr. Maclosky Jones can only be touched by a civil action; but I hope to give them a bit of evidence to-morrow about that canny Scot which may just open the door of Bow Street wide enough for him as well as Robinson."

"Wingfield, I forgive you," said Decker, smiling. "Let us shake hands."

Wingfield put out his hand in a shamefaced way, overcome by Decker's frank, genial manner.

"I am a hasty sort of chap," he said. "I beg your pardon for losing my temper."

"It was my fault," said Decker; "and you couldn't bear a word of criticism, knowing how well you had done your work. Say no more about it. Keep on, Wingfield, keep on; I will supply Mr. Brayford with funds. Pile on the coal, keep the engines going; I won't detain you a moment; do your work, I'll do my part."

The soft June wind came through the flowers in the window, as if to woo Decker into a tender frame of mind when the man and woman hunters had gone forth to join the great human processions in the streets. London was in her gayest attire, and there was a blue sky overhead. But Decker's thoughts were at Boulogne. He would hurry his departure thither. Mr. Topper Wingfield might plunge still deeper into secrets which he regarded as his. He would call at the West End Bank of Deposit to find if Mr. Tom Sleaford was in Paris or Boulogne; he would say farewell

to Caroline; he would leave a letter for Kerman excusing his absence from the wedding; and leaving the trains of powder all laid for systematic explosion, in regard to the legal processes which had been well and successfully commenced, he would now make the acquaintance of Tom Sleaford, *alias* Philip Gardner.

Received by an old familiar colored-nurse, by a butler from the South, and surrounded with every indication of wealth and comfort, Mrs. Gardner, when she awoke the morning following her arrival at Lancaster Gate, felt like one who has just come out of a bad dream. If she had fallen into a low, depressed condition, under the influence of adverse fortune, her spirit appeared to rebound with the change. It was as if the dark face touched some long silent chord that started old melodies in her memory, and linked the present with the past, bridging over with delicious music the black unhappy interval. Old in experience, her heart was still young. She fairly ran from one room to the other in what seemed to her a fairy palace. Drawing-room, library, winter-garden, studio, she lingered here and there like a butterfly in a newly-found garden of floral treasures. Tears of joy hung upon the dark fringe of her black eyes, and the parted lips uttered vague words of joy. Then she would go to little Willie in the nursery, where Chloe sung lullabies as she did in the old days; and here her happiness would suffer eclipse. She would sit down and cry, and lose herself in wondering efforts to recall the past and trace out the story of her life. Then would the pale face of Decker steal into the eye of her mind, and her longing heart would cry aloud for that oblivion of the past which she knew, by an instinctive understanding of Decker's nature, could alone unite two souls which Fate had thrust asunder. Thus it was with Caroline Gardner in her new home. She had alternative fits of happiness and melancholy, but, as Decker had told her, time and the exercise of a generous disposition in benevolent acts would bring her peace of mind, which was, after all, the truest happiness.

It was a sad parting, that of Decker with Caroline.

"We shall meet again," he said. "I dreamed that he was dead, Caroline; that your marriage was proved; that you were a widow; and I thought that my time had come too, and you consented to go through the world with my

name; and that little Willie was rechristened, and you called him Tristram Decker."

He looked earnestly at her as he spoke, and she noticed that his face had grown thinner, even in a week; that the flush upon his cheek was hectic; that his complexion was almost fair; and she was afraid.

You do not speak, Caroline. If it were as I say would you marry me, so that, if there should be a future state, I might claim you in the world to come?"

"Why wait for dreams and the world to come?" she said, in a passion of emotion. "Take me now, Tristram; I am yours, and none other's. Oh, if you could but forgive me!"

She buried her face in her hands and sobbed. He laid his hand gently upon her head, and soothed her with soft and gentle words.

"Listen, Caroline," he said presently.

She looked up at him with the expression of a child under the direction of a loving parent.

"Your words comfort me, and make me strong; but listen. I want to look deeper into your heart. Listen, my poor child. If I brought you that same certificate of marriage, all in order——"

"Yes," she said, nodding her pretty head, from which a raven plait had fallen upon her shoulders; "I am listening."

"And supposing I brought him, Philip Gardner, repentant at your feet, to have your marriage proclaimed and your husband for a companion through life?"

She shrank from him as he spoke, and answered him at last with a cry.

"Oh no, no, never! I can die, so can Willie. We can both die with you, when you have proved our innocence. Purify the name of Caroline Denton from the stain that cruel Fate has put upon it; let it be known that Willie has the right to be here; that the name of Denton is above dishonor; and then——"

She brushed the tears from her eyes, and looked steadfastly at Decker.

"And then we can die; but we can never live with Philip Gardner again."

"But," said Decker, struggling to appear calm, "even now you would have had me remain here, and defy all the laws of——"

"I know, I know what you would say; but I am only a woman, and I love you, Tristram. What would be dishonor where love is not, becomes virtue where love is; true self-sacrificing, devoted love."

"My dear Caroline!" exclaimed Decker, snatching her to his arms, "you almost make me wish to live. Farewell, till we meet again."

The next moment he was gone; and, with his kisses still warm upon her lips, Caroline looked up vacantly, as if her eyes sought something in the room.

"No," she said, "it was not a dream; and yet he is not here."

CHAPTER II

HOME AGAIN.

GOLDEN summer, yellow with buttercups, bright with the flowers of the mustard seed, green with waving corn, genial breezes full of humming sounds and sweet perfumes. Manor Farm, with its broad, straggling old house, slumbered in the sun. The great Lincolnshire flat, indeed, seemed all asleep, like a laborer lying by the roadside at noon. The tall grasses in the dykes moved gently, as if they whispered to the dragon flies that balanced themselves on their airiest stems. The blue smoke of the old house went up in two long columns to the blue sky. Here and there, far away in the distance, other homesteads could be seen, with a few trees clustering round the stackyards, and a poetic suggestion of summer haze hung about the picture as if to "vignette" it, as the engraver treats a sketch on the wood.

Mr. and Mrs. Kerman had come from Paris and London. Tristram Decker did not go to the wedding, but he had loaded Jane with marriage gifts. Mrs. Gardner was present, and she had accompained them home. Kerman had said that he would rather keep the honeymoon at the Farm than at any other place, and Jane was so overjoyed at her husband's longing to be back again in the old county, that they came almost straight home from the altar, Mrs. Gardner and little Willie travelled with them, attended by Chloe,

the colored nurse, and a maid. The beautiful southern woman had fallen with quick facility into her new mode of life in London. She had been so accustomed to luxury as a young girl, that she returned to the habits of wealth with an easy, familiar grace. Her house at Lancaster Gate soon became one of the best regulated as well as the most perfectly appointed establishments in London. Little Willie was growing up into a fine, handsome boy, and he occupied his mother's chief attention. She found continual delight in his happiness. Sometimes a stranger, contemplating her life, might think she had not a care in the world, and had never known a heartache. But she had her fits of depression as well as of elation. Her ambition, her hopes, her joys centred in little Willie, who possessed all his mother's warm, loving nature. She seemed rather to dream her existence away than have a share in the activities of life. Before her easel, at the piano, driving in the park, at her devotions on Sunday, she seemed to live in a world of her own; and looking into her soft, loving eyes, you could see that it was not an unpleasant world.

On this summer day in the drawing-room at Manor Farm, with the windows all open, and outer blinds protecting them from the sun, were assembled John and Jane, and Mrs. Gardner and little Willie. Jane, buxom and happy to the tip of her fingers, was sitting upon a low chair by her husband, who was talking and rocking himself to and fro in an American chair. Mrs. Gardner was sitting by one of the open windows, her eyes resting upon her two friends in a half attentive, half dreamy way. In a corner of the room Chloe and little Willie (the child partly reclining upon a bundle of cushions) were turning over the leaves of a great book of pictures.

Kerman was relating his adventures. He never tired of recalling the past. Jane was always ready to listen. Mrs. Gardner's attention never wandered for a moment when Kerman dealt with events in which Tristram Decker's name was mentioned. It was a happy, lazy time, and it brought to Caroline's mind the few glimpses of calm content which had stolen at odd moments into her existence in the Vale of Essam. It was Jane's turn to let her attention wander a little, or to pretend not to listen all the time, when John told Mrs. Gardner the story of Uncle Martin's will and his desertion of Jane. This plain narrative of a woman's devotion was brought to a fitting

termination with an old box, which John insisted upon having on a pedestal in the entrance hall as a memento of Uncle Martin's goodness and a warning to assurance and pride. The letter which it had contained was a touching example of the old man's kind heart, and a sharp illustration of his worldly knowledge :

"You are not to let John Kerman see this until you are married to him. If he takes after his father, he could bear good fortune like a man, and give it to the woman of his heart the same. But if he be his mother's son he would be flighty about it, and apt, maybe, to forget his benefactor."

"He was a clever old man," said Kerman, pausing, with the faded letter in his hand, to look at Mrs. Gardner, "a downright old observer. He knew me to the very core."

"Don't say that, John. It was his love for me that blinded him. I always told him so," remarked Jane.

"No, no, Jane; he knew his man. I don't want to say that I was a particularly bad fellow, Mrs. Gardner," said Kerman, "but I was a fool, and under the influence of false pride. But listen now to this dear old agricultural philosopher,—

"If I left all to you and none to him, he would fret under his obligation to you, for he does not think of you as loving as you of him. A true woman loves a man; it is everything; nothing shakes it; a man has other ideas; he can shoot and hunt, or labor, and find the pleasure of hunting in making money and hoarding it up as I have. If John do not love you, it would be misery to you if he was not well off. Suppose he do love you, then he would be proud to share his money and land with yours. I have behaved bad to him. It was something like being jealous, I think, and then he was always so independent; he would never bend, and he was always right, doing every stroke of his work to the last. If he had been a bit humble like, maybe it would have pleased me, and I had a mort of sorrow in my old heart nobody knew of, which maybe I tried to keep out of sight by damning and going on, when I could as soon have cried as swore."

"Poor old man!" said Kerman, while a tear trickled down Jane's rosy cheek.

"'It's a mortal pity we are not strong enough to tell the truth and shame the devil, until we think we be come to our last Harvest Home; but it's no good thinking that now. So Jane, my dear girl, I have left property in such a way that Jack, if he be minded to do what is right, will soon change your mourning gown to a wedding dress; and if he be proud and the like, well, you will have enough, and so will he; and I make no doubt, if he do go wrong and trip a bit, it may come right later on. Way I have left money, howsomever, will try him, and show what he's made of, and Jabez Thompson, my dear old friend, though a lawyer, he will take care as no harm comes to you. You will be surprised at all the property which is now yours, but it has been my only care for years and years to accumulate it. God bless you, Jane, my good, kind girl, and my first prayer, since I was a young man, is for your happiness. Amen, and good-by.

"'EPHRAIM MARTIN.'"

"The dear old boy!" said Kerman, folding up the letter and putting it back into his pocket-book; "he looked a long way ahead, and thank God it has all come right at last!"

A knock at the door brought old Goff upon the scene.

"Missus thinks it's time carriage went to Burgh to meet folk as is coming by afternoon train," said the old man, looking at Kerman; "and she says should I go wee it?"

"Yes, Goff," said Kerman, looking at his watch; "Mr. and Mrs. Tavener may be expected at Burgh in a couple of hours. Go with Peter to the station by all means."

"I will," said Goff.

This interruption changed the drift of the conversation, which now turned upon the Taveners, and thence to Brayford and the Retreat.

Mrs. Gardner told the story of her escape from Miss Weaver, and the rescue by Brayford, and the kindness of the Aarons. The Southern woman spoke as if she was addressing little Willie in the hayfield at Essam. There was an unaffected originality in her method, an almost epigrammatic force in her sentences, which in an orator would have been the result of study. It was almost like listening to a

reading to hear Caroline, in her innocent, picturesque way, talk of her father's New Jerusalem, the house of bondage, and the persecutor who would not let the children go. She had the Egyptian history of the chosen in her mind, when she dwelt upon her early troubles in London, and her description of the blameless long life of the Jew-Christian household in High Street, Marylebone, was idyllic in its tender passages of grateful appreciation.

The moment Caroline began to speak, Chloe's ears were opened, and her black face looked up from child to mother. When her mistress came to the latter part of the story, which was as new to the Kermans as it was to Chloe, the old servant found it difficult not to scream aloud her satisfaction. She compromised the point by hugging little Willie. The Kermans had not heard of the arrest of Major Wenn and the exposure of the Weaver frauds. Caroline was now enabled to finish the narrative with the news of Wenn's conviction and sentence to five years' transportation, and Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson's committal for trial in connection with some City frauds, on the clearest possible evidence.

It was left, however, for Mr. Fred Tavener to supply almost the last threads of the narrative of the working of the just punishment which had overtaken some of the wicked people in this romance. Neither he nor Kerman suspected who had pulled the strings and enforced the action of tardy justice. It was after dinner on this quiet summer day that the two men sat over a bottle of claret and talked of recent events. The women had retired to have a delightful chat all to themselves.

"It occurred a week ago," said Tavener, "and last night I had a letter about it. Emily has no idea that it was so serious. She has always been used to her father in money difficulties, and she thinks he has gone to avoid the service of a writ. Roper saved the old man. A warrant, it appears, was issued for the arrest of old Sleaford whose Bank of Discount and Deposit turns out to be not quite correct. When it was found Sleaford had left town for Paris it was concluded that he had levanted. He was expected home in a week. Instead, he returned the next day, and the clerk to the magistrate who issued the warrant, being an old friend of Roper's, and knowing that he was about to marry Patty, gave him a hint. Roper, finding from Mrs. Sleaford that the old man had gone to see his son, started

after him; and as luck would have it, met him at Victoria Station returning. Sleaford gave him a pitiable account of a quarrel he had had with his son, which had ended in that scoundrel, Tom, knocking his father down and kicking him into the street. So he had returned to London, he said, to bring his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Roper told him quietly of the danger that threatened him, and Sleaford, in an utter state of collapse, left himself in Roper's hands to do the best for him. They came to my house in a four-wheeler. Emily had gone to see Patty. We put a wig on the old man's bald head, and otherwise converted him into something quite unlike his original self, and last night I had a letter from Roper, written *en route*, to say that they would be safe in Spain, outside English laws and extradition treaties, by the time I received the letter."

"A clever fellow that Roper. By the sacred stars and stripes—as Decker would say—you surprise me. It is a pity somebody does not wring Tom Sleaford's neck."

John Kerman looked for a moment as if he would not object to do it himself; but his face resumed its expression of calm geniality almost at once.

"I don't know," he said. "Perhaps it's better to leave a scoundrel to his fate. I don't believe God leaves the punishment of a bad lot like Tom Sleaford till after he's dead. But I forgot, Mr. Tavener, pray forgive me—after all he's your wife's brother."

"He is none the less scamp and worse,' said Tavener "but I feel obliged for her sake to think of that. Sooner or later he must come to some terrible grief. Roper tells me he is living an infamous life of knavery, and I confess it made my heart ache to see his father cry, as he begged me to be careful because his cheek and jaw were bruised.

"Poor old wretch! he is not the sort of a man one ought to pity, Tavener, but somehow I should, even if I did not think of his two girls, one your wife, the other once on the way to be mine. I suppose he couldn't help doing shady things. Perhaps it is because one has plenty of money that ceases to be resentful, He took me in, Tavener, to a pretty tune. But, there, we've wiped out all that long since. What we have got to do now is to make things as pleasant as we can."

"Just so; I am glad that is your view.'

"He can't come back to England again I, presume?"

"I think not."

"It will all come out, I suppose, presently in the papers?"

"I fear so."

"Can't we settle the business?"

"You can't sette fraud—They call it compounding a felony."

"f Decker were here, he would disagree with you. suppose we could do something by restitution? I mean by giving back money wrongfully obtained?"

"No doubt we could."

"Telegraph to Roper, and ask him to come down here. Don't you think that would be the best way to begin? I suppose he will return the moment he has landed Sleaford safely in Spain?"

"Yes, that he will, not only to get married, but to consult with me as to the next step. I ought to go back to London."

"No I won't listen to that. Let us telegraph to Roper."

"Very well."

Kerman rang the bell, and a few minutes afterwards a servant was galloping to Burgh with a message.

"If there is any public exposure, on the first suggestion of it," said Tavener, "I shall take Emily to Italy and stay there for work a couple of years."

"We will have no exposure. Jabez Thompson shall go up to town with a blank cheque and settle the whole thing. Now, that's the best idea yet. You don't know Thompson, of the firm of Thompson and Foxwell. Cleverest man in England. Was taken in once, it is true. Tom Sleaford rides well, shoots well, and is a rare hand at whist. So is Thompson; but that is neither here nor there. Jabez shall go to town. Jane shall ask him. Don't wince. I shall tell her all about it, and Thompson will do anything in the world she asks him. He rode over to Shegwell Bay this morning. He is sure to call here on his way home."

"Please, Mister Kerman, sir, the missus would like to see you," said Kester, entering the room without warning, and in what would be regarded as an unpardonably familiar manner by a Belgravian master.

"Thank you Kester. We are both to come into the drawing room, eh?"

"Aye, that's about it I reckon," said Kester, smiling.

"Very well, Kester; say we will come at once."

Then, turning to Tavener, Kerman said he supposed his

friend would be rather shocked at the friendly sort of relationship that existed here between master and servants.

"Not at all; I like it," said Tavener.

"Goff and his wife, you see, are like old friends. I am going to make Goff the steward, and let him work the place. I shall build him a house at the top of the Hundred Acre Close. We are going to buy Grundy Hall and the estate, where Dymoke, the Member of Parliament, lived. I can remember the time when I should have felt shamefaced at going into the place on a message, and if I'd been asked into the parlor I should have been a good deal more awkward than Goff. And now, Tavener, I am going to buy the estate. Not that I think we shall ever live there. If we do, it will only be until we have turned Manor Farm into a fine place. You see, Jane has a hobby, and it's land. She is not proud, but she would like to own half the county."

Kerman laughed aloud at this view of Jane's humility.

"And, by Decker's stars and stripes, she shall, Mr. Tavener, she shall! Pride! She hasn't a spark of what people call pride; but she has a great notion of lands and properties. I shall never forget when she came to London and tackled me about parting with land. Bless her heart! she's fond of freeholds. She's like Uncle Martin in that. You will begin to think I'm a talker soon. Come, let us go and see the ladies, and then you shall do the talking, eh?"

Manor Farm had never in its history seen such gay and festive times. The wildest dreams of Uncle Martin in the interest of Jane Crosby could not have framed such a picture of luxury and ease. Mrs. Gardner wore a dress, the seed-pearl trimmings of which, and the gems round her neck, would have purchased a flock of Kerman's sheep and the fee-simple of the meadows in which they were feeding. Emily Tavener was dressed as an artist loves to see his wife—in a curious, pretty, out of the way style, and she sang merry songs as a set-off to the sweet but plaintive ditties which belonged to Mrs. Gardner's *repertoire.* The Southern woman did everything in a peculiarly original style. Even her songs seemed new. A familiar ballad on her lips found a fresh significance, and she played her own accompaniments as if she made the piano sing with her, Jane Kerman, in what Mrs. Goff called "a speck and span ball dress such as nobody ever saw in the Marsh," set off the Oriental loveliness of Mrs. Gardner, and also presented an advantageous

contrast to the metropolitan style of Mrs. Tavener. The fresh, genial, blooming beauty of Jane Kerman asserted itself with a frank amiabiliy that took out of it all the arrogance of really handsome, beaming womanhood. The two men —Fred Tavener, in evening dress, John Kerman, in a loose serge jacket—made up a group worthy of any society The sun had gone down and the windows were open to the long green and yellow landscape and the first red beams of the setting sun.

In the relationship of these three women it seemed that the sorrow which Tom Sleaford had wrought among them had bound them the closer together in bonds of sympathy and affection. They were like three sisters who had the misfortune to have a bad brother and they never allowed themselves to talk about him; though in the silent watches of the night his cruel shadow sometimes fell upon the dreams of the woman whom Fate had not saved from him, as Jane Crosby had been, until she had felt the bitter cruelty of his nature. Nevertheless, Time was making her some amends. There is hope of sunshine for ever so sad a sorrow, when Time has an ally in youth and health. In Caroline's case these advantages were coupled with wealth and a love for the arts and all that is beautiful in nature. Strange to say, that burning desire to establish her name and maintain its honor had died out. She had one hope to which she clung. It was bound up in her love for Decker, and one great happiness which was not denied to her—the companionship of her child, which grew day by day into a more absorbing and compensating pleasure.

Her worst dreams never brought Philip Gardner back to her, yet he is on his way to claim his wife and take possession of her property.

CHAPTER III.

A TRAGEDY.

For nearly a whole week the wonder of a certain Paris gambling house was the large sums of money that an English captain had won from an American millionaire. Captain Gardner was known to be a blackleg. His associates were men with the hearts of fiends and the manners of gentlemen.

His chief house of resort in Paris was the residence of a showy woman who called herself Madame Gardner. When she considered an excuse necessary to account for the fact that the villa was her own, and that Captain Gardner did not live there, but was only one of her guests, she said the arrangement was her own choice; she was French, he was English, and they had decided upon a policy of mutual and individual freedom. Captain Gardner smiled satirically, and twirled the ends of his waxed moustache, as the keeper of the gambling-house thus intimated to her clients that they must not imagine she was unprotected. If they thought for a moment they could trespass upon her, she wished them to understand that the English captain was at her elbow. The truth of the relationship between the two needed no explanation. only that even the frequenters of the villa did not know that Captain Gardner and Madame Gardner were partners in the establishment, on a business basis by regular deed "signed sealed and delivered."

The captain had brought Mr. Tristram Decker there as his particular friend, and the American had lost immense sums to the captain, who at the outset explained to Decker that he was *incognito* at this place.

"Don't care," he had said, "to have my name bandied about among such a set, so I call myself Gardner there."

Tom had said this on the day Decker called upon him, and in response to Decker's wish to see something of Paris life. Decker had replied,—

"You English are so circumspect; as for me, it doesn't much matter where I am seen or who knows me. I haven't many months, they say, to live, so I want to live all the time."

The wonder among the men who went to the Villa Adrienne was that the American should be so friendly with the captain. Neither the heaviest loss, nor the apparent contempt in which Captain Gardner held him, ruffled Monsieur Decker, who seemed as pleased when he lost as when he won. Then they came to the conclusion that, after all, Americans were just as droll as the English members of the same eccentric national family. A new-comer, who had been introduced by one of Madame Gardner's casual visitors on the very day when Tristram Decker appeared, excited almost as much interest. He was a Turk, Fabien Pasha, a silent, gentle amiable old man, who soon became intimate with Captain Gardner and Monsieur Decker. Fabien Pasha

spoke French fairly well, and he appeared to have plenty of money. He did not play high, but he evidently enjoyed gaming, and he gave several private dinners at the Hetel Bristol, at which Captain Gardner and Tristram Decker were present.

Decker had taken a suite of rooms at the Grand Hotel and Captain Gardner spent most of his time in the Ameri can's company. Madame and some of her friends had, with grim humor, advised Captain Gardner to pluck the Yankee eagle quickly, before Monsieur Consumption claimed the fine bird altogether ; and the Englishman was acting upon the hint.

" You are a gay dog, Mr. Tom Sleaford," said Decker, over a little dinner which they had eaten without company in order that the American might talk over his plans.

" Might as well call me Gardner," said Tom. You may let the other name slip in conversation at the villa, and I shouldn't like madame to hear it."

" And a sly dog,' said Decker. " Madame, I expect, is not the only conquest, eh ?"

Tom smiled a grim, cruel smile. His face was never a frank, open countenance ; but when we first saw it in Fitzroy Square it was angelic in comparison with the hard, sensual, and rapacious expression which had transformed it into a reflection of the man's heart. As the young man had increased his wicked practices, so had vice registered them in his countenance, one by one, until the awful history could be read by any keen observer who cared to study the man and the face.

" Oh, I have had my innings ; I can't complain," said the captain.

" You have never been in America ? "

" No."

" Ah, you have an experience to come !"

"Yes ; they tell me your women are devilish pretty."

" They are : that is true."

" After all, one need not cross the Atlantic to see pretty American women."

" No. Do many of them come to England ? "

" Yes, and to Paris."

" Have your conquests ever extended to my country-women ? Beware how you confess, Captain Gardner : I am very jealous of the honor of my compatriots, men and women."

"I used to know a very pretty American woman,' said Tom, as he sipped his coffee and smoked a cigarette.

"Ah," said Decker, sighing, "don't mention her name, or I might know her, and then perhaps we might not continue good friends."

"Your patriotism is romantic," said Tom.

"What was she like?"

"A brunette from the South : a beautiful girl—but a vixen, a regular vixen."

Decker pressed his feet upon the ground and closed his teeth.

"But Fabien Pasha's is the right idea, after all. Beauty palls on a man. The harem is the only reasonable arrangement, and it has the advantage of being ordained by Scripture."

"Yes; every man finds an ally in the Scriptures, whatever his vice may be."

"Vice, Mr. Decker! You don't call that vice?"

"You parted, then—you and the lady, the brunette?" said Decker, not noticing the question.

"Oh, yes; she was right enough for a time, but I got tired of her."

"Ah, you men of society, you are like butterflies. And what became of her?"

"Became of her—damn her!"

Decker found it difficult to sit still.

"Don't curse the woman."

"Damn her!' exclaimed Tom, defiantly, as the scene on a first Sunday after Christmas occurred to him. "You would curse if you knew the trick she served me."

"But what of the trick you served her first, *mon ami?*" said Decker, with wall-acted coolness.

"Trick' said Tom, who only thought of that never-to be-forgotten Sunday. "She was a strumpet before I knew her."

"Tom Sleaford, you lie!' exclaimed Decker, springing to his feet.

The *ci-devant* captain leaned back in his chair, and stared at the white face with its never-fading flush under the eyes.

"I beg your pardon, Captain Gardner,' said Decker. "Really I was not thinking what I said. You see we Americans are sensitive about our women."

Two hours after this incident, Tristram Decker was closeted with Fabien Pasha.

"I'll shoot him!" said Decker.

"Monsieur knows his own business best," said Dr. Dampez.

"The low, crawling lying thief; he ought to die twenty deaths!"

Decker paced the room, stopping now and then to cough.

"A duel is easy. Are you a good shot?"

"Yes."

"Insult and call him out."

"I dreamt this morning—it was a wakeful dream: I knew it was a dream, and it seemed as if I prolonged it at will—I dreamt that he sat before me in The Cottage at Essam; he was dead, except his brain; I told him his history and mine; I laughed at his agony as it was depicted in his face; I told him of her wealth; I explained my first hopes about him, that a reconciliation might be possible; I hit him in the face; I gloated over him like an Indian with an enemy tied up for torture and death; I told him he would lie in his coffin alive in the very house where he had seduced her and disowned her; and I awoke laughing."

Decker coughed and struggled to a seat.

"My pupil, to talk like this is madness; you are losing your self-control. I gif you a leetle soothing draught, see."

The doctor took a phial from his pocket, poured half its contents into a tumbler of water. Decker drank it and sat down.

"You haf gif me all your confidence, more than I wish. I haf gif myself to you in return for money that make me income for life. I sell myself to you, Some philosopher sell to *le diable*; I to Crœsus, and when I sell I am yours, but with condition, you make a plan, you carry it out or not, it is done or you leaf it alone."

"Forgive me, doctor. It must not be myself whom I consider, but a woman, and you will pardon me that I do not say who she is. If I shoot him, as I would at Decker's Gulch, scandal seizes upon her; it we fight a duel, it is not that I value life, but an accident might leave him in the world to persecute and torture that woman and her child."

"Well, well, that is sentiments, and not for me; philosophie dispense with that; keep it in your own breast,

monsieur; only, once for all, and the last time, is your first plan to stand?"

"It is," said Decker, "if that dream may come true."

His face was haggard, his lips apart, he gasped for breath.

"To-day is Monday. On Friday you take him to your English estate. After dinner your dream."

The doctor took a heavy pinch of snuff, Decker nodded his satisfaction.

"And now, monsieur, you sleep a leetle. Did Monsieur le Capitaine tell you he insult me after you leaf Madame Gardner's last night?"

"No."

"Ah, he did; he was a leetle drunk, and he call me a name which was impolite and a lie."

"What did you do?"

"I came home to my leetle room in this quarter, which I haf for years when I am in Paris, a leetle room where I am Dr. Dampez and not Fabien Pasha; I came home, I mix a leetle of my own secret, Numbres Two, I call it, and I take my pinch of snuff and I say, "Wait, Monsieur le Capitaine, I come for yon." But nevair mind that; you now go to sleep a leetle, this week I build you up, I gif you courage, I make for you strength, a heaven on the earth for you; a hell for the English thief."

Decker slept. Dampez took snuff and watched him.

A new motive had strengthened the Dampez-Decker alliance, and had, at the same time, increased the necessity for caution. Madame Gardner was the lady who had been tried in London the Longville poisoning case. She had given Dampez to understand that she was in Italy. The relationship between her and Dr. Dampez had been of a more intimate character than patient and doctor. This was suspected by judge and jury, but never proved. Madame had met Captain Gardner at Boulogne and Paris. Tom Sleaford was a bold wooer, as the reader knows. They lived at the Villa Adrienne. In less that six months it was turned into a gambling-house, and madame became the ostensible proprietress. She knew Dampez under his disguise of Fabien Pasha; but there was at once a tacit understanding between them, arrived at as if by instinct, that they would elect to be strangers.

"I am a philosopher," said Dampez to himself, while contemplating Decker; "but I haf a strange unaccountable

sympathies with this young man. He shall die, that English thief of the night; it shall be a revenge for him and for me,"

On the Thursday of the same week Decker had arranged that Tom Sleaford should receive the news of Caroline Virginia Gardner's accession of fortune. He was present when the captain received the letter.

"You have good news?" said Decker.

"The devil does take care of his own," said Tom. "'Pon my soul I think it's best to chuck over everything the world calls respectable, and be a free lance."

"You have come into a fortune?"

"Yes, my wife has; it's all the same."

"Your wife?"

"Yes I'll show her whether I am her husband or not," he exclaimed, snapping his fingers.

"Do you mean madame, at the Villa Adrienne?"

"Do I mean Madame Longville! Curse her! No. Listen," he said, reading from the letter in his hand; "the American Government, or a Federal commander, one or the other, have compensated her for all her father lost. I don't know all the facts, but she's now worth more than a million, and she is living in grand style at Lancaster Gate."

"That must be old Graham Denton's daughter," said Decker.

"You've hit it," said Tom, folding up the letter. "By Jupiter, I'll lead her a dance!"

"She is your wife, you say?"

"Yes, my wife."

"It is reported in London that she is a single woman. When I came away, American society was talking about the case."

"This letter's true, then?"

"Oh yes, quite true; everybody's talking of it in London."

"What does she call herself, then?"

"Miss Caroline Denton, I presume."

"She is my wife, Decker, and I can claim everything she possesses."

"She can't be the brunette, the American girl you were telling me of the other day?"

"No—well, not exactly, but she's a vixen, for all that. Oh, but we shall be good friends now! I shall just have to show her who the master is to begin with, and then? You

must come and see us, Decker; there will be a pair of us then—a pair of millionaires,"

"I don't know about that," said Decker. "I think there would soon only be one millionaire if we continued to play cards. However I'm glad you've come into all this money. I congratulate you."

Decker put out his hand. It was cold and chilly.

"I shall go to London on Saturday," said the captain.

"Come to Essam with me, *en route*."

"To where?"

"The Cottage, Vale of Essam."

"What do you mean?"

"I bought it a few weeks ago."

"You did?"

"Yes, is that so odd? Don't think that interferes with the Quorn estate. You have undertaken to engineer that business for me.'

"Yes," said Tom, his face still full of a surprised expression. "You must be awfully rich Decker."

"Didn't your father tell you so?"

"Yes; but we had a trifling misunderstanding, and he did not conclude the business. I left him in a huff. But it is strange you should buy The Cottage. It's a stunning place for a quiet lark. Damme if I shouldn't like to see the place again! I was down on my luck when I left it."

"This is your plan, then. We get there in time for dinner to-morrow night; and on Saturday we will go up to town together. What do you say?"

"The fact is, Decker, I've won so much of your money that I feel myself at your command. Are there billiard tables at Essam?"

"Yes, I believe so; I bought the place furnished as it stood."

"You don't know how strange this is," said the captain. "I'll go with you. I'll give you your revenge at billiards in your own house; and before we go to-bed to-morrow night. I'll tell you all about it. Meanwhile, look at this."

He unlocked a travelling-case and produced a document. It was the original marriage certificate of which Decker had the copy. Captain Gardner read it.

"Then you married in a name not your own?"

"Precisely."

"And is such a marriage legal?"

"To-day I shall take this before a proper officer. I

don't know what they call him in Paris, but there is an English solicitor who will tell me all about it. I shall make an affidavit that I, Tom Sleaford, am Philip Gardner. It's just as well to be properly armed when you go to take possession of property which somebody else may claim. I shall pin that affidavit to the certificate, and put both into my pocket-book, for use or not, as circumstances may require, and on Saturday night I shall sleep in my new house at Lancaster Gate. Damme, I'm in luck!"

Tom Sleaford leaned back in his chair and uttered a hard sinister chuckle, which conveyed to Decker, more than words, the utter heartlessness of the man whom he was now more than ever resolved not to leave behind him when he should be summoned to go.

Captain Gardner was late in arriving at the Villa Adrienne on this Thursday night. He said he had only just left Dr. Fleury's. "What was the matter?" they all asked. He had been taken ill in the street, he said All he remembered was that he had suddenly lost the use of his limbs. A soldier caught him, and he lay in his arms to all appearance insensible. "But I was as sensible," he continued, "as I am at this moment. I couldn't move, I couldn't speak, but I was all right otherwise. The fit lasted ten minutes, I suppose. They carried me to Fleury's. He says I drink too much, smoke too much, and live too fast; I ought to marry and settle down to a life of regularity. I told him that was just the thing I was going to do; that in fact I had done half of it, but had not yet settled down." madame looked at Fabien Pasha as the captain described his symptoms; but in a short time the incident was forgotten in play, and it found almost utter oblivion when Captain Gardner, excited by wine and some taunting remark of madame's, suddenly rose, and in a drunken speech informed the company that he had that day given notice to dissolve the partnership between himself and Madame Longville, and that he was going to leave Paris to join his real wife in London on the next day. Madame said some bitter things in reply. She pressed Fabien Pasha's hand at parting, and begged he would call and see her the next day alone.

"By the time you arrive at Essam, a leetle sooner, a leetle later," said Dr. Dampez, as daylight was stealing into his private room, where they had appointed to meet after leaving the Villa Adrienne, "that fit will come on again;

it is better it should, that there may be no mystery at the last; haf a doctor call, and he will talk of you cannot burn a candle at both ends, and the fatal result that come of debauchery and dissipation. After dinner, at night, your dream come true."

Decker shuddered.

"I go to London on Friday night; on Saturday you find me, if you want me, at the old place; if you not come, you find me on Tuesday at Villa Adrienne. I haf done all for you I can; now you act for yourself. I give you the leetle phial which I call Nombre Trois. In the water-bottle or the wine. *Comprenez-vous?* Ah, that is good. *Au revoir*, it may be *adieu!* Well, we shall see."

And it came to pass, just as Dr. Dampez had foretold, that Captain Gardner was taken ill on the platform at Essam, and that on his recovery from the fit half an hour afterwards the local surgeon had delivered himself of a homily on fast living and the vices of dissipation. Unfortunately for the patient the doctor knew him again, and his life at Essam rose up to bear witness against him, and to justify the local practitioner's words.

The peace of Essam fell upon the troubled soul of Tristram Decker. The hum of the summer atmosphere, full of gentle life, sung a lullaby to the flowers. At the gate, as they entered the Cottage precincts, a sensation of awe possessed him. Among the clustering roses that climbed the portals of the house a sweet face seemed to be looking at him. His companion asked him what he was staring at. But for a red flush under the eyes Decker's face was extremely pale. His answer to his companion was a fit of coughing. It occurred to Tom Sleaford that the American had not long to live. But after a little while Decker seemed strong again, and his guest, pulling himself together with a bottle of champagne, was full of boisterous spirits.

Decker proposed a walk in the grounds. His guest said he knew them too well. He would prefer a game at billiards. He was anxious to give his friend a fair chance to recoup his losses. The tables were in excellent condition. But Decker found no pecuniary revenge in the game. At last Sleaford proposed to play for The Cottage. He had already won enormously. Decker said no, he would not risk The Cottage, as he had bequeathed it to a lady. As a closing bet he had in his pocket-book a two thousand pound

bank-note; they would play one game for that sum, and that must close their transaction for the present. Decker lost. When they had washed their hands and sat down to smoke a cigarette before dinner, Decker led the conversation up to Sleaford's visit to Lancaster Gate.

"Now, look here, captain," said Decker, presently; "you have plenty of money—why not let that little woman in London enjoy her good fortune in her own way without interfering with her?"

"What do you mean?"

"You say she is a vixen, and I conclude you do not love her."

"Love her! Bah!"

"I have heard she is an unassuming, quiet, kindly lady."

"Indeed! You should have heard her talk to me on the lawn outside."

"But you didn't treat her quite well, eh?"

"Didn't I! And what of her? How has she treated me? Comes into a fortune and never says a word. I might be starving for what she knows or cares. I'll show her! I'll wake her up, never fear!"

"Didn't you tell her she was not your wife, you had tricked her?"

"What of that? You seem to take a great interest in my wife?"

"I do; I knew her father."

"Indeed; well, if you will come with me to-morrow you shall know her."

"Don't think me obtrusive, Captain Gardner; but, knowing her father, and feeling an interest in my countrywoman, let me ask you, is there any chance of your granting her a divorce, and——

"A what?"

"A divorce."

"What for?"

"On the ground of desertion, say; that, I believe, is sufficent."

"Not on any account. I like her. Just now I love her. Why, what are you talking about? Didn't old Fleury advise me to marry and settle down? I'm going to do it, now that I've something to settle upon. Why, my dear friend, I mean to cut a dash in London this very season. A

mail phaeton in the Park, a pretty wife by my side. Damme, I'll make Lancaster Gate howl, as you Yankees say!"

The speaker laughed that hard, metallic laugh which had shaken Decker's nerves before. It only now made them rigid. He bit his lip as the Englishman looked admiringly at himself in a mirror, and twirled the waxed ends of his moustache. The cruel malice of the face, framed in the black mounting of the glass, struck Decker like a blow, stimulating his wavering spirit.

"Look here, Mr. Decker," continued the captain, after surveying himself; "Caroline Virginia Denton is my wife. When she did not know it I gave her the chance to be relieved of me. In return she served me a dirty trick. She joined a conspiracy against me, in combination with a fellow named Brayford. I'll tell you what it was after dinner, since you take such an interest in her."

The speaker's face expressed intense malice as he paused to look at Decker and ask a question—

"Do you think she has a heart?"

"I know she has."

"Do you believe hearts can be broken?"

"I know they can," said Decker sadly.

"Then, by the God above me, I'll break that woman's heart clean in two!"

The speaker stamped his foot as he uttered the diabolical threat, and Decker laughed. Tom Sleaford had never heard his companion laugh before. It was not alone on that account that he was startled; but there was something so incongruous in Decker's previous remarks and his laughter at what ought to have enraged him that Tom turned sharply round.

"You laughed?"

"I did."

"I thought you would have been mad."

"There was a time when I should have been."

There was a look of triumph in Decker's blue eyes which astonished Tom Sleaford more and more.

"You are a queer fellow, Mr. Tristram Decker."

"I am. I was trying to soften you in the interest of Caroline Denton, thinking I could perhaps wipe out the past, and make you friends. Have you ever tried to push some painful event that has blighted your happiness right away into the shadow?"

"Not I! I don't know what you mean. But I'd like

to see the man woman or child who'd wipe out of my memory a certain event that happened in Lincolnshire. Well I don't know—they may do it next week, perhaps, when Tom Sleaford has proclaimed his marriage. I'll show my lady! And as for Mr. Brayford I'll break his back."

"Will he be there?" asked Decker, who seemed to Sleaford to have become quite jocular over the business.

"He will."

"Shall you do it in the daylight?"

"Whenever the opportunity occurs."

"He's a strong fellow, and smart too?"

"You know him, then?"

"He is a friend of Mr. John Kerman's."

"You know him too?"

"We are partners."

"In what?"

"Gold mines and other property."

"Kerman!" exclaimed Sleaford.

"Yes; he married a Miss Crosby."

"Married! When?"

"A fortnight ago, I think. Since you and I first met."

"You astonish me! The governor said nothing of this."

"Perhaps he did not know it."

"Mr. Decker you are a mystery to me."

"Am I! We shall be better acquainted soon."

"What do you mean? There is something strange in your manner. You are laughing at me."

"No; it amuses me to think how small the world is, and how we all come together, everybody we have ever heard of or known. Kerman used to talk of you in the Sacramento, when we were winning our fortunes."

"Indeed!"

"He said you were a good fellow. I think he thought so. But he didn't know the world."

"Then I am not a good fellow?"

"Good fellows don't want to trample on helpless women."

"No? Then I'm a bad fellow, for I do, and I will—on one of the sex, at any rate."

"You brute!" exclaimed Decker, unable to maintain the calm sarcastic tone which he had assumed; "if you were in America I would——"

Decker had risen to his feet. His passion induced a fit of coughing, which left him panting on a seat.

"I'm a fool," he said when he could speak. "Don't let

us talk of this business any more. I owe you an apology; you are in my own house—it is not for the host to insult his guest."

"Say no more about it. If I had lost as much money to you as you have to me I should be riled; I might even try to pick a quarrel with you."

Dinner was announced.

It was a plain English dinner, cooked and served by the servants, who hsd been taken over with the house by Sparco at Decker's request. When it was finished Decker proposed another game of billiards.

"You can go to bed," said Decker to the woman who waited on them. "Leave out some soda, brandy, and champagne."

They had finished two games, and Decker had won both of them, to the surprise of his guest, when Philip Gardner, *alias* Tom Sleaford, staggered, and would have fallen had not Decker caught him and laid him on a couch, beneath the window that looked out upon the wood, where the birds had seemed to listen to the woman prattling to a child, some summers back, in the field that was once more waiting for the haymakers.

Tom Sleaford looked helplessly at Decker.

"This is your third attack?" said Decker.

The patient moved his lips.

"It is your last" said Decker, with the solemn air of a judge pronouncing a culprit's doom.

There was a visible effort on the part of the unhappy wretch to move.

"You are poisoned. Listen. You can understand all I say?"

The staring eyes of the stricken man looked an affirmative answer.

"If you had had a spark of manliness in your composition you should have been spared. Whether it is God's work this conclusion of a diabolical career, or mine, I know not The supreme moment is more terrible than I concluded. If you think there is a God, pray to Him, Your faculties are still under your own control. Pray if you like, but waste no time."

After a short pause, Decker resumed :—

"Originally it was in my mind to gloat over you when this last scene should come : to remind you of your brutal and inhuman conduct ; to tell you I loved Caroline Denton

so truly that I would one day have found contentment in knowing that she was happy with another; to torture you with the knowledge that just as fortune is within your grip it is I who strike you down; to tell yon that I condescend to become an assassin, to save your wife from scandal; Fabien Pasha is the famous, or infamous Dr. Dampez; his draughts leave no sign for coroner's inquests; besides, Dr. Fleury told you from what complaint you suffered. and your local physician has already confirmed that opinion, Dr. Dampez is a great man. He has calculated your death at the third attack almost to a question of minutes."

The eyes of the dying man moved. An expression of agony passed over the dry, hard features.

"If I could have fought you in a duel, or shot you in a quarrel, I would have preferred it to the cowardly secrecy of Fabien Pasha's artful aid; but I had resolved that Caroline Denton's life should from henceforth be unruffled,except by her memories of the past; that your death should appear to be the natural result of your infamous life; that she should find peace in early widowhood, and, if wealth can give contentment, the pleasure of knowing that every wish that money can satisfy may be hers. To-day my heart failed me. I would once, I think, have changed my plans. One ray of human light from your black heart might have made me pause. You remember that I laughed. No wonder it startled you. Not less was I surprised myself. The executioner had pronounced your final doom in that mocking laugh. Nemesis was at your elbow; for it needed a slight blending of the wine you liked so much to bring on this third and last attack. Tom Sleaford, *alias* Philip Gardner, your body is already dead. Your brain is alive and active. Listen! The money in your pockets and in your travelling case belongs to your wife. I shall take care that she is in speedy possession of the certificate of her marriage and your affidavit. If you prayed just now, and there is a God to hear you, it may be a consolation to you to know that you have a son who has inherited all his mother's goodness and virtue and that in a son's love and devotion she may forget a husband's cruelty and dishonor. Philip Gardner, *alias* Tom Sleaford, adieu! I go to call the servants. They will carry you to a bedroom which will recall past days. They will send for that doctor who knows you. He will say that you are dead. You will be alive all the time. You will hear them say what a hard, cruel man you were while you were living. If all this

does not make you feel that, if there is not a God, there is at least some eternal law of reward and punishment, you will die as you lived—a hypocritical, heartless blackguard. On the other hand; should the justice of your death and the manner of it touch your dull, leaden soul, you will relent, and if you do, according to the Scriptnres, you will go to heaven and be happy; and if you don't you will go to hell, and you can rejoice over me, for you will then understand, how much you have made me suffer in this world, which but for you, might have been a heaven for me! Farewell! In an hour you will be a dead man. Make the most of your time!"

Just as Decker had foretold, so it came to pass; and the next day Caroline Virginia Denton Sleaford, at one and the same time, knew that she was a wife and a widow!

CHAPTER IV.

PEACE.

Time has its own beneficent method of smoothing the rugged ways of sadness and sorrow. When, a year after the burial of Tom Sleaford, there came to England Tristram Decker's last message to John Kerman and Caroline Gardner-Sleaford, with the news that he had found his way back to New York, and died there in the arms of his father, there was heartfelt and bitter mourning in two households three thousand miles from the shores of Manhattan. But it has been ordained that the mind shall accustom itself to the visits of Death, and see in them the removal of loved ones to a better land. It is a comforting and a holy philosophy that almost finds an earthly pleasure in contemplating the joys of a future state.

The beautiful widow who spent half the year at Lancaster Gate and the other half in the Vale of Essam was a happy woman. Her's was the bliss of living to do good and to enjoy the pleasures of art. From the moment when we saw her standing upon that ship in the distant port, destined to bring with her the black threads of trouble which should

complete the weft of this romance, she was also fated to be the good angel of the legend which the weaver's shuttle had to portray in his cloth of silk and gold.

The American woman was destined to play the part of Fortuna. Her hand served to soften the blow which fell upon Mr. and Mrs. Roper, and upon Emily Tavener and her husband, when a crowd of duped depositors thronged round a house in Baker Street, and sacked the financial trap of Jeremiah Sleaford. Her hand succored many of the poor people who had suffered by the failure; and Mr. Jabez Thompson found means to help the others. It is not always true that the wicked are punished in this world in proportion to their deserts. At this very moment, while I am writing these lines, I am informed that Mrs Jeremiah Sleaford last month joined her husband at a delightful village in the kingdom of Granada, which she reported in a letter to be "under the beautiful shadow of the Alpujarras, which, my dear, the Moors considered to be part of heaven; and your father is contented and happy, freed from the cares of finance, which he vows he will not touch again. Thanks to his thoughtfulness, we have enough for all our wants, and though the odious English laws and his cruel enemies in London have made England impossible for us, we shall not complain, now that our dear children, for whom alone your father fought and strove always, are settled and happy; but we hope that Emily will come over with Mr. Tavener and visit us soon; your father would so much like Fred to paint some of this scenery; you, my dear Patty, might also find some beautiful effects of sunshine; later in the year we propose to travel. Seville is considered to be a lovely city for the winter. and if Mr. Roper and you, my dear child, will meet us there, your father says oranges can be plucked and eaten in the open air when London is suffering from fog and chill and snow, which is a comfort to think of when one is an exile in a strange land. We also find consolation in knowing that I have been able to provide you with a house for your married life, and your father now fully realizes the benefit of having had the Fitzroy Square property put into settlement, and I hope you have had your £10,000 secured in the same way." Patty and Roper found that they suited each other well, and they did not propose to winter at Seville, for the youngest of the Sleaford girls was engrossed in the study of a pink and white subject which gave her a great deal more trouble than the production of certain studies in

water-colors which now adorn the walls of the drawing-room at Fitzroy Square. Jeremiah's grandson is said to be the image of his mamma; indeed, Emily tells Fred that "it is quite a baby doll, in complexion and in features." Tim Maloney sticks to the old house at present, and has taken a fancy to the baby; though he sometimes threatens to join "the masther" in foreign parts and he varies this with the hope that "Ould Ireland," may want his services soon, seeing that the latest report of a celebrated Fenian leader announces "the decline and fall of the British Empire, and the coming conquest of England by the gallant sons of Erin." It is true Tim winks and utters a genial "bedad" when he tells Mr. Roper that this is one of the events that may call him suddenly away from London; though he promises, when the Irish-American contingent sails over the sea to join the Ribbonmen, the Whiteboys, and the Fenians of Connaught in sacking London, the corner house of Fitzroy Square shall be spared, and be jabers but he doesn't know he won't have the entire square preserved in honor of the young master, though he declines to make any binding promise upon that point.

Brayford is still the private secretary of Mr. John Kerman, though he continues to reside in London, the better to advise Mrs. Gardner-Sleaford in regard to the management of her property, and also to fulfil the duties of private almoner to that estimable lady. The Footlights Club came to an ignominious end a year ago, but the few distinguished members of it have signed a requisition to their old friend Harry Brayford to join them in the formation of a new society on the old lines. He has already named the new club in memory of a dear friend who no longer studies the first page of a morning paper, and dwells upon the genius of his chief. It is to be called "The Wonner." Mr. Brayford has already purchased for the new rooms a grand piano, and it is his intention to revive the once familiar chant in which the Wonners, like their predecessors, will declare their undying affection for "Old Brown's Daughter," their united belief in the propriety of her conduct and their full and settled determination, supposing they were a lord mayor, a marquis, or an earl, to marry no other lady than old Brown's girl. Brayford, for the first and last time, really carried out his idea of the three-act epitaph, when he raised a monument to "The Wonner;" and after some revision by the directors of the cemetery,

and a discussion with the clergyman of the parish, he was allowed to have it engraved upon a tablet, which though a well-intended and not unworthy tribute to "my intellectual friend, and once the partner of my literary toils," is a curious example of that grim satire which too often characterizes memorial honors to posthumous frame. Brayford idealized Mr. W., who will go down to posterity as an eccentric genius in whose honor a company of celebrated men founded a fantastic club.

Monsieur Favart captured the fascinating Weaver, on the eve of her marriage, in New York, with the captain of the ocean steamer in which she had crossed the Atlantic. She had been the life and soul of the vessel during a very pleasant voyage. The captain was a young officer who had just been promoted. Some of the male passengers, who were jealous of the lady's preference for the captain, said he was too inexperienced for his position. They knew better than that, for he had sailed the sea, man and boy, for five and twenty years. It flattered them in their declared opinions of his verdancy when on their return voyage in a sister ship they learnt that the lovely Miss Beauchamp Dudley, as Miss Weaver called herself, had been arrested for fraud, and taken to England. Major Wenn, in an unbecoming prison dress at a certain convict prison, confided to the chaplain that he thought it rather hard he should get five years, and Weaver only six months. He concluded that the judge had been led away from the path of duty by 'Isy's siren smile." The chaplain turned out to have been an old friend of Wenn's in India, and this was the one ray of light that illuminated the mind of the reflective major, as he helped to make the prison clothing, under the watchful eye of a warder, who had his sword by his side, and all manner of sanguinary weapons in the expressions of his face. Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson looked at the murky daylight as it crept through the bars of a prison in a country adjacent to the one which encompassed the gallant Major Wenn. Robinson had not been broken in for prison life by the discipline of a military career. While Major Wenn fell into a strict observance of prison regulations, Mr. Fitzherbert Robinson resisted the unaccustomed pressure, and had become acquainted with a dark cell and a light diet. Nemesis was surely nodding when, with these men under lock and key, Mr. Maclosky Jones still flourished. Perhaps the justice of the situation was considered poetically met in the

fact that Mr. Maclosky Jones had made a fortune out of Sleaford's Omaha script, which had suddenly and unexpectedly realized all the wild dreams of the infatuated speculator in mines. Maclosky had recently taken to preaching, and he promises to become a shining light as president of a new society for converting the Jews to a sense of their misery in being outside the fold to which Mr. Maclosky Jones lends the sanction of his name and the financial aid of one hundred pounds per annum.

Summer time at Essam comes, with perfumed breath and songs of birds, to find a thoughtful hostess surrounded by English friends; Autumn is full of ripened joyfulness at Manor Farm; and the sunshine that illumines grateful hearts is most like heaven, when it follows the chastening of Winter winds.

THE END

WOMAN'S PLACE TO-DAY.

Four lectures in reply to the Lenten lectures on "Woman," by the Rev. Morgan Dix, D.D., of Trinity Church, New York.

By Lillie Devereux Blake.

No. 104, LOVELL'S LIBRARY, Paper Covers, 20 Cents, Cloth Limp, 50 Cents.

Mrs. Lillie Devereux Blake last evening entertained an audience that filled Frobisher's Hall, in East Fourteenth Street, by a witty and sarcastic handling of the recent Lenten talk of the Rev. Dr. Morgan Dix on the follies of women of society.—*New York Times.*

Mrs. Lillie Devereux Blake is a very eloquent lady, and a thorn in the side of the Rev. Dr. Dix, and gentlemen who, like him, presume to say that woman is not man's equal, if not his superior. Mrs. Blake in her reply to Dr. Dix's recent lecture upon "Divorce," made some interesting remarks upon the sex to which she has the honor to belong.—*New York Commercial Advertiser.*

There is no denying that Mrs. Blake has, spartan-like, stood as a break-water to the surging flood Rector Dix has cast upon the so-called weaker sex with the hope of engulfing it. It is sad to see a gentleman in the position Dr. Dix occupies setting himself deliberately at work to not only bring reproach upon the female sex, but to make us all look with comtempt upon our mothers and sisters. And the worst of his case is that he has shown that spirit in the male part of mankind, which is not at all creditable to it, of depreciating the intellect, the judgment, the ability and the capability of the female sex in order to elevate to a higher plane the male sex. According to Dr. Dix the world would be better were there no more female children born. And he makes this argument in the face of the fact that there would be "hell upon earth" were it not for the influence of women, and such women as Mrs. Lillie Devereux Blake, especially.—*Albany Sunday Press.*

Mrs. Blake's was the most interesting and spicy speech of the evening. She was in a sparkling mood and hit at everything and everybody that came to her mind.—*The Evening Telegram, N. Y.*

A stately lily of a woman, with delicate features, a pair of great gray eyes that dilate as she speaks till they light her whole face like two great soft stars.—*The Independent, N. Y.*

* * * She advanced to the front of the platform, gesticulated gracefully and spoke vigorously, defiantly and without notes.—*New York Citizen.*

* * * a most eloquent and polished oration. The peroration was a grand burst of eloquence.—*Troy Times.*

Lillie Devereux Blake, blonde, brilliant, staccate, stylish, is a fluent speaker, of good platform presence, and argued wittily and well.—*Washington Post.*

There are very few speakers on the platform who have the brightness, vivacity and fluency of Lillie Devereux Blake.—*Albany Sunday Press.*

She is an easy, graceful speaker, and wide-awake withal, bringing our frequent applause.—*Hartford Times.*

Mrs. Blake's address was forcible and eloquent. The speaker was frequently interrupted by applause.—*New York Times.*

The most brilliant lady speaker in the city.—*New York Herald.*

Has the reputation of being the wittiest woman on the platform.—*San Antonio Express.*

Mrs. Blake, who has a most pleasing address, then spoke; a strong vein of sarcasm, wit and humor pervaded the lady's remarks.—*Poughkeepsie News.*

FOR SALE BY ALL NEWSDEALERS AND BOOKSELLERS

JOHN W. LOVELL CO., Publishers,

14 & 16 Vesey Street, New York.

BRAIN AND NERVE FOOD.

Vitalized Phos-phites,

COMPOSED OF THE NERVE-GIVING PRINCIPLES OF THE OX-BRAIN AND WHEAT-GERM.

It restores the energy lost by Nervousness or Indigestion; relieves Lassitude and Neuralgia; refreshes the nerves tired by worry, excitement, or excessive brain fatigue; strengthens a failing memory, and gives renewed vigor in all diseases of Nervous Exhaustion or Debility. It is the only PREVENTIVE FOR CONSUMPTION.

It aids wonderfully in the mental and bodily growth of infants and children. Under its use the teeth come easier, the bones grow better, the skin plumper and smoother; the brain acquires more readily, and rests and sleeps more sweetly. An ill-fed brain learns no lessons, and is excusable if peevish. It gives a happier and better childhood.

"It is with the utmost confidence that I recommend this excellent preparation for the relief of indigestion and for general debility; nay, I do more than recommend, I really urge all invalids to put it to the test, for in several cases personally known to me signal benefits have been derived from its use. I have recently watched its effects on a young friend who has suffered from indigestion all her life. After taking the VITALIZED PHOSPHITES for a fortnight she said to me; 'I feel another person; it is a pleasure to live.' Many hard-working men and women—especially those engaged in brain work—would be saved from the fatal resort to chloral and other destructive stimulants, if they would have recourse to a remedy so simple and so efficacious."

H 70 86

EMILY FAITHFULL.

PHYSICIANS HAVE PRESCRIBED OVER 600,000 PACKAGES BECAUSE THEY KNOW ITS COMPOSITION, THAT IT IS NOT A SECRET REMEDY, AND THAT THE FORMULA IS PRINTED ON EVERY LABEL

For Sale by Druggists or by Mail, $1.

F. CROSBY CO., 664 and 666 Sixth Avenue, New York.

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

HECKMAN
BINDERY INC.
JAN 86
N. MANCHESTER,
INDIANA 46962

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00022146002